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ABSTRACT

The first statewide direct writing assessment was conducted for grade 8 by the California Assessment Program (CAP) in the spring of 1987. Each student wrote an essay in response to 1 of 15 prompts (writing tasks) representing: (1) an autobiographical incident; (2) a report of information; (3) a solution to a problem; and (4) an evaluation. In all, 282,155 essays were scored at four regional sites by 290 teachers; this number includes some papers double scored in a reliability study. About 99% of the students had responded to a topic. Scoring considered rhetorical effectiveness, a feature score about some characteristic (such as coherence), and a conventions score for mechanics. Most students wrote adequate or marginally adequate essays (68%), some wrote exceptionally well (13%), and others wrote poorly (19%). Eighth graders were most competent at reporting information, less competent at writing autobiographies, and least able to produce the two types of persuasive writing. Control of the conventions was better than of rhetorical strategies. Recommendations for teachers begin with encouraging more direct writing instruction and more analysis of what is read. Recommendations for school administrators, parents, and teacher educators are included. (SLD)

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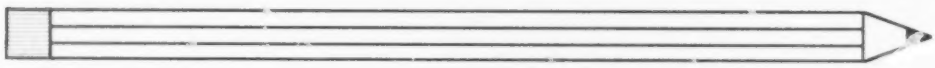

A First Look

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Writing Achievement of California Eighth Graders

A First Look

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Special acknowledgment is due to the creators of the assessment: the members of the CAP Writing Development Team. Representing the California Literature Project, California Writing Project, and California Association of Teachers of English, this group of outstanding teachers has provided crucial leadership in test development, scoring, and staff development activities for CAP.

The CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee has functioned in a central advisory capacity, bringing continuity from a grade eight pilot project conducted in 1984 to the first statewide assessment in 1987. It was this group that identified the types of writing to be assessed at grade eight, recommended a slow and careful phase-in of the several types of writing, and pointed out the need for staff development to help districts prepare for the assessment.

The spring 1987 writing assessment, which reflected the activities of these two groups, culminates in this report. Members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee and CAP Writing Development Team (listed here) also reviewed sections of the report, contributed to the interpretation of results and offered recommendations.

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Chapter 1

Executive Summary of the Report

California's first statewide direct writing assessment was conducted for grade eight by the California Assessment Program (CAP) in the spring of 1987. Each student wrote an essay in response to one of 15 prompts (writing tasks) representing four types of writing: autobiographical incident, report of information, problem solution, and evaluation. This report, based on state-level results from that assessment, for the first time provides California's educators, legislators, and citizens with data on the actual writing achievement of virtually all students in the state at one grade level. In previous years only multiple-choice tests of written language skills were administered by CAP. Because 1987 was the first year of the assessment, this report contains baseline information only and does not include information about year-to-year changes.

California's writing assessment was designed to be a wide-range achievement test to reflect the goals and standards of excellence contained in the *English–Language Arts Framework*[1] and its related curriculum documents. The assessment directly addresses guideline number thirteen in one of those documents, the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide*[2], which states that:

> Students, after having opportunities to build background, write in many different modes of discourse, such as story, observation, biographical sketch, poetry, dialogue, essay, and report.

Four types of writing were assessed in 1987 for grade eight (autobiographical incident, report of information, problem solution, and evaluation). Two additional types are being included in the 1988 assessment (biographical sketch and story), and two more will be added in 1989 (speculation about causes or effects and observational writing). Thus, the complete array of writing types will have been assessed by the end of the third year. As the assessment evolves, new prompts related to literary texts and to broad understandings in science and history–social science will be added to address a broader range of goals in the framework.

Two key groups have guided and created California's new direct writing assessment since its inception. Providing guidance for the overall direction of the assessment has been the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee, which consists of elementary and secondary school teachers; curriculum specialists, testing experts and administrators from school districts and offices of county superintendents of schools; university professors; and representatives from the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project. All prompts, scoring guides, and the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] were created by members of the CAP Writing Development Team, consisting of English teachers from across California who were selected for their extraordinary performance in the classroom.

The CAP Writing Development Team developed a scoring system so that each paper would be assigned three scores: a rhetorical effectiveness score reflecting the thinking and composing requirements within a type of writing; a feature score providing additional information about a characteristic in the writing such as coherence or elaboration; and a conventions score reflecting the degree of correctness in usage, punctuation, and spelling. All scoring guides were developed on a scale of 1 to 6, ranging from minimal evidence of achievement to extraordinary achievement.

During July, 1987, a total of 282,155 essays were scored at four regional scoring sites (Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego and Walnut Creek) by 290 teachers in eight days. The total number of essays consisted of the 268,719 papers collected in the assessment plus a 5 percent sample of papers that was double-scored for the reliability study.

The test results revealed that students took the new test seriously. Approximately 99 percent of the students who took the essay test comprehended the writing tasks and responded to the topic. (Less than one-quarter of 1 percent failed to respond to the writing task, and approximately one-half of 1 percent did not respond to the topic.)

Major Findings

Major findings from the assessment follow:

- Most students wrote adequate or marginally adequate essays (levels 4 and 3: 68 percent). A small percentage of students wrote impressively (levels 5 and 6: 13 percent); a larger percentage of students (too many in the opinion of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee) wrote poorly (levels 1 and 2: 19 percent). (For examples of student essays illustrating each score point for each type of writing, see chapters 4 through 7.)

- Grade eight students seemed most competent at reporting information (52 percent scored 4 or higher); noticeably less competent at autobiography (46 percent scored 4 or higher); and markedly less skilled at the two kinds of persuasive writing in this assessment—arguing for solutions to solve problems (41 percent scored 4 or higher) and supporting their judgments (34 percent scored 4 or higher).

- Grade eight students demonstrated better control of conventions than of rhetorical strategies. For example, in evaluation 34 percent scored 4 or higher for rhetorical effectiveness, and 58 percent scored 4 or higher for conventions. For every type of writing assessed, students scored higher in conventions than in the thinking and composing requirements for each type of writing.

- Essays were most coherent in autobiographical incident and more coherent in problem solution than in evaluation.

The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee agreed that many students who do not do well are those who are tracked into "skill and drill" curricula in which bland dittos and worksheets substitute for effective writing instruction. The committee members expressed the expectation that scores would improve markedly in future years as teachers benefit from the statewide staff development efforts being conducted by the California Literature Project and California Writing Project, as they learn to work more effectively with the *Writing Assessment Handbook*[3], and as many teachers gain insight into establishing criteria for student writing.

Recommendations

Recommendations from the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee and CAP Writing Development Team for teachers, administrators, parents, and teacher educators follow:

Recommendations for Teachers

1. **Teachers should offer junior high school and elementary school students more direct instruction in the special writing and thinking strategies required for different types of writing.** Teachers should expect of each student the highest possible writing achievement in several kinds of writing, not mere competency in one or two. Teachers will need to assign sustained (multiparagraph) writing frequently and help students revise to strengthen rhetorical effectiveness. By helping students analyze their own writing along with published writing, teachers enable students to gain confidence with the special writing strategies of many types of writing.

2. Because writing development depends in part on reading development, teachers should ensure that all students read widely, analyze some works in depth, speculate about characters' motivations, reflect on human values, and debate social issues. **Students should also have an opportunity to read and analyze the same type of reading they are writing. For example, they should read and discuss published autobiography as they write autobiographical incidents and first-hand biographies, short stories as they write stories, articles speculating about the causes of events or phenomena as they write essays speculating about causes, and so on.** The *Writing Assessment Handbook Grade 8*[3] includes suggested readings appropriate to the types of writing CAP assesses.

3. **Teachers should extend the intensive and sustained literacy program described in the first two recommendations to all students—disadvantaged students as well as advantaged students, students whose primary language is other than English as well as fluent speakers of English, and low achievers as well as high achievers. Some students are denied opportunities for such enriched programs as a result of inappropriately low teacher expectations. Special efforts must be made to ensure equally challenging classrooms for all.** "Limited-English Proficient" students should have opportunities to build on their abilities to think about a topic by beginning with informal writing and proceeding through the writing process to produce fully realized essays. All students should have practice telling and writing about their experience as it supports their emerging values and opinions.

4. **Teachers should provide more careful instruction in types of persuasive writing, such as those assessed by CAP, for students in middle school.** In keeping with Recommendation 2 teachers should present samples of persuasive writing as literature in junior high and middle schools to provide students with exemplary models to help them write their own arguments. (See *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] for suggested readings for evaluation, problem solution and speculation about causes and effects.)

5. **Teachers should discuss with each student the specific strategies of autobiographical incident (using dialogue; providing visual details of scenes; and showing characters moving, talking, gesturing) to help them lift their writing above the level of rambling or brief generalization.** This emphasis should be reinforced by the careful reading of published autobiography and the use of exemplary models of student-produced autobiographical writing such as those included in the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3].

6. **Teachers should help students use the stages of the writing process, with special attention being given to specific composing strategies for different kinds of writing so that students will learn to revise their writing with the help of**

appropriate criteria. The best classroom writing assignments require a rich, sustained composing process for completion: discussion, prewriting, or research; drafting; teacher conference and guided peer response; revision; appreciative peer readarounds; student self evaluation of learning during the composing process; and display or publication. (See the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program*[4], for a more complete description of the stages of the writing process.)

7. **Teachers should keep in mind other types of writing not assessed by CAP as important and worthwhile types that should not be dropped simply because they are not tested.** There are types of writing (such as poetry and song lyrics) that are desirable in a well-rounded English–language arts program but not appropriate for large-scale assessment.

Recommendations for School District and School-Site Administrators

1. **School-site administrators should ensure that CAP writing assessment materials are available to all English–language arts teachers.** These materials include *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement: Grade 8*[5] (1987), along with scoring guides and sample essays (mailed to all junior high and middle schools in November, 1987); and the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] (mailed to all California school districts with an eighth grade in November, 1986). (For further information regarding these documents, contact the CAP office at 916-322-2200.)

2. **School-site administrators should bring all teachers together to discuss the possibilities for sustained writing in all classes at all levels.** Beginning in 1988, CAP grade eight test prompts will direct some students to write about their learning in history and science as well as their reading of literature. A middle school with grades six through eight might want to divide up for special emphasis by grade levels the eight types of writing to be assessed by 1989, ensuring, however, that each type is returned to at least once each year. Such a plan, combining writing with core and recreational reading requirements, would provide the systematic, articulated English–language arts curriculum called for in California's *English–Language Arts Framework*[1]. (See Section IV, "Management Guidelines," in the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3].)

3. The best staff development model for English–language arts provides for a series of workshops over a substantial period of time. If students are to meet the high literacy standards set by the CAP writing assessment, junior high school teachers need a deep understanding of the writing and thinking demands of a wide range of types of writing. Such understanding requires time to read, write, and discuss. One-time staff-development presentations offering only further gimmicks will not deepen teachers' understanding of discourse or increase their students' achievement. **Administrators should make a special effort to help teachers schedule in-service training workshops extending over several sessions and led by qualified teacher-consultants.**

4. Because good writing instruction requires an amount of tutorial or conference time, teachers must be able to talk to students about their writing in progress, not just mark and grade finished essays. **For this basic requirement for good writing to be met, class size must be reduced for all English–language arts teachers in California schools.**

5. Many publishers and private consultants are already offering materials and workshops and promising to improve students' scores on the CAP writing assessment. Schools and school districts should evaluate these offerings carefully. Schools should especially consider whether published materials offer anything not already available in the teacher-developed, classroom-tested *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3]. Consultants promis-

ing formulas, easy solutions, or quick results will have little to offer teachers who want to teach seriously the types of writing CAP assesses and to prepare their students for adequate to high achievement in these types. Consultants who are unable or unwilling to concern themselves with the specific rhetorical requirements of the types of writing CAP assesses will be able to add very little to what teachers already know. **If writing instruction is to move to a new level of effectiveness—to become an even higher priority within the context of a balanced literature-based English–language arts curriculum—then only the best-qualified consultants will be able to contribute materials and workshops.** Members of CAP's Writing Development Team are qualified to advise other teachers, along with California Writing Project and California Literature Project Fellows who have been specially trained to present CAP materials.

6. The CAP writing assessment should not supplant individual student writing assessment at the school site. **Schools need to develop their own assessment programs, such as portfolio assessment or schoolwide assessment of writing samples.** The CAP writing assessment provides teachers with useful strategies and techniques for their own assessments. For example, the types of writing assessed in grade eight suggest a wide range of writings that might be included (or even required) in a portfolio, and criteria outlined in the scoring guides could assist in evaluating a student's best work in a portfolio. Additional types of writing, such as poetry, song lyrics and dialogue, might also be included. Writing portfolios can follow students from year to year and provide repeated occasions for students' assessments of their writing development and for parent conferences.

Recommendations for Parents

1. **Parents should encourage good teaching of writing by inquiring specifically about the amount and variety of sustained (multiparagraph) writing their children are being assigned in every class.** They can ask how much of the writing will be revised for both rhetorical effectiveness and conventions. Parents can show their appreciation to teachers who make engaging assignments and encourage children's writing development.

2. **Parents should show their children that they are especially interested in all the writing they complete at school.** Children can read their writing aloud and display it on the refrigerator door, and they can talk about what they like best about a piece of writing. Parents should respond first of all to the ideas and insights in the writing. They should look for something to praise and need not correct errors unless asked by the children. To persist with the challenging work of learning to write, young writers need their writing to be taken seriously and to be praised and encouraged, especially by parents and siblings.

3. **Parents can ask their children to write.** Several writing situations are suggested by classroom teacher Mary Adamczyk (in the *New York Times*, January 3, 1988). Students may be encouraged to:

   - Compose invitations to a dinner, party, or picnic.
   - Compose stories for a sibling.
   - List things needed for an overnight stay.
   - Plead a case for an additional privilege—anything from a later bedtime to a driver's license.
   - Make a deal ("If you let me . . ., then I'll . . . .") Considering faulty memories, this is a particularly good time to get it in writing.
   - Justify an allowance increase with an expense account and budget, perhaps including a savings plan.
   - Rationalize a special purchase (for example, a hamster or a computer video game).
   - Negotiate wages for extra chores by submitting a written bid

describing the work to be done, benefits, wages, guarantees, and deadlines.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

1. **College and university English departments should offer English teachers in training a balanced program in literature, language study, and writing.** Teachers need writing workshops as well as literature courses. They must be knowledgeable about the full range of written discourse. Better, they should be confident writers across the full range of written discourse.

2. **English methods courses should introduce students to the new *English–Language Arts Framework*[1] as well as to CAP writing assessment materials.** The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] and *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 12*[6] can contribute substantially to students' education in contemporary discourse. Model student essays, scoring guides, writing assignments, classroom activities, and recommended readings provide rich material for discussion and lesson planning.

References

1. *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
2. *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
3. *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
4. *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
5. *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement: Grade 8*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
6. *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 12*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.

Chapter 2

Writing Assessment: Description and Rationale

Public education has become the focus of numerous studies that have created an unprecedented awareness of the schools and new demands to provide for students the best that the schools can offer. The importance of writing and thinking to the education of all students—indeed, to the survival of a democratic society itself—has been made clear in those studies. For example, in *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, Ernest L. Boyer states that:

> The first curriculum priority is language. Our use of complex symbols separates human beings from all other forms of life. Language provides the connecting tissue that binds society together, allowing us to express feelings and ideas, and powerfully influence the attitudes of others.[1]

Yet we are reminded again and again that many school programs are falling short. Students often report being bored with school. And teachers work with little more than "teacher-proof" materials and lockstep programs. The *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*[2] characterizes the ineffective English–language arts program as a fragmented skill-based curriculum that limits students to work sheets and activities addressing only low-level cognitive skills. Writing programs in which students are typically assigned low-level tasks and papers are read only for the conventions of usage, grammar, and spelling are not uncommon. The loss of human potential as a result of such stultifying programs is difficult if not impossible to assess.

The authors of the Middle Grade Task Force report, *Caught in the Middle: Educational Reform for Young Adolescents in California Public Schools*[3], emphasize that for all middle grade students there is a compelling need to ensure an intellectually stimulating school environment. They state:

> Students in the middle grades experience a rapid unfolding of their intellectual capacities. There is a dramatic emergence of the ability to think reflectively—to think about thinking. This ability opens the way for more complex and abstract thought processes. These have profound implications for the development of moral reasoning, problem solving, critical thinking, and the ability to use scientific methods and make aesthetic judgments.
>
> These capacities must be matched educationally by curricula and instructional practices which demand both thought and thoughtful communication in the classroom. . . . Academic achievement rises when students experience thoughtful classrooms. But achieving these goals is complex.

The authors of the Middle Grade Task Force report offer a number of recommendations for achieving academic excellence and helping students realize the "highest and best" in their development. In the area of assessment they recommend that:

> Assessment programs for the middle grades should be comprehensive; they should include measurement of a broad range of educational goals related to student achievement and program effectiveness; the primary purposes of middle grade assessment should be to compile data which lead to improved curriculum and instructional programs and more effective student support services.

If one were to imagine an effective statewide program designed to stimulate needed reforms in middle grade schools, certain criteria would immediately come to mind. One might imagine that such a program would raise intellectual standards and expectations that are achievable under improved instructional conditions; that it would stimulate increased breadth and comprehensiveness related to student achievement and program effectiveness; that it would introduce something new and yet still be familiar and respectable to teachers and would correspond with teachers' intrinsic understanding of valuable educational goals; that it would receive public attention encouraging entire school communities to work together to promote better learning; that it would provide practical materials and associated staff development activities to help teachers implement these new standards on a day-to-day basis. Such a program is already in place in California.

In the spring of 1987, California's first statewide direct writing assessment was conducted in grade eight by the California Assessment Program (CAP). Because this program is still new to many of California's educators, policymakers, and citizens, this document includes a program description and brief rationale underlying the program (both of which follow in this chapter), a description of the development of the assessment (Chapter 3), and the state-level results from the assessment (chapters 4 through 9).

Description of the Assessment

California's new grade eight writing assessment is unique in the nation. Several special features that distinguish this program from other writing assessments are described in the following sections: (1) standards of excellence; (2) multiple types of writing and thinking assessed; (3) unique scoring system; and (4) supportive instructional materials.

Standards of Excellence

Although many states administer direct writing assessments, most of the assessments are part of minimal competency testing programs and typically include only one topic in a given year and represent one type of writing for all students. California's writing assessment was designed to be a wide-range achievement test reflecting the literature-centered goals of the *English–Language Arts Framework*[3], which calls for instructional programs that guide all students through a range of thinking and writing processes as they study aesthetic, ethical, and cultural issues. While challenging the best students, the test enables all students to demonstrate their achievement as writers. The scoring system created for the assessment sets high standards of achievement for each type of writing assessed and allows for the monitoring of progress from year to year at the school, district, and state levels. This assessment embodies the spirit of the school reform movement and is far removed from tests designed to measure the minimal skills that students might need to function at a marginal level in society. Particular attention has been given to making the system accessible to all minority students and students with special needs (as described in Chapter 3 of this report).

Multiple Types of Writing and Thinking Assessed

Matrix sampling, in which each student takes only a fraction of a total test in any given content area, has been used on all CAP tests since 1973-74. This technique is extremely efficient because it requires less time for testing, results in a broader coverage of the curriculum, and yields more stable results for reporting to groups (schools and districts) and more information that teachers can use to evaluate and strengthen curricula. Of course, matrix sampling does not provide scores for individual students. The most important virtue of such tests—even beyond efficiency and reliability—is their potential to achieve breadth and balance in content coverage, as called for by the Middle Grade Task Force. This factor is especially apparent in the assessment of writing.

Students should be systematically taught a complete array of types of composing and thinking to prepare them adequately for higher education, the job market, and citizenship in a democracy. As stated in the *English–Language Arts Framework*[3], "the world of work and academia demand of students many forms and types of communication." Matrix sampling is an ideal testing strategy for an assessment designed to promote systematic instruction in a wide variety of types of writing and thinking.

Eight types of writing that reflect a wide range of writing experiences were selected to be phased in over a three-year period in grade eight: (1) report of information; (2) problem solution; (3) autobiographical incident; (4) evaluation; (5) story; (6) first-hand biography; (7) observational writing; and (8) speculation about causes or effects. The first four types were assessed in 1987. Story and firsthand biography were added in 1988, and observational writing and analysis of causes or effects will be added in 1989.

Unique Scoring System

The scoring system developed for the CAP writing assessment was designed to be a state-of-the-art model for the nation. The system uses three types of scores and measures general as well as specific features in each essay. Each of the 268,719 essays produced in the assessment was scored for (1) rhetorical effectiveness, which focuses on the special thinking and writing requirements for each type of writing; (2) a general feature, such as coherence or elaboration important to the type of writing being assessed; and (3) conventions of usage, grammar, and spelling.

A three-level scoring system has numerous advantages. The rhetorical score provides information about students' achievements in the special thinking and composing requirements of a type of writing; and, without creating restrictions or formulas, the scoring guide provides a clear road map to improved achievement. School reports of the results allow teachers to compare student achievement on different types of writing and to assess instructional strengths and weaknesses, factors leading to improved curricula concerned with higher-order thinking, writing, and communication abilities. The special feature score provides additional information about the ability of students to achieve coherence or provide sufficient support and elaboration in a given type of writing. The conventions score reveals students' mastery of the conventions of standard written English so that teachers can compare and contrast student achievement on higher-order composing skills (as reflected in the rhetorical and feature scores) to student achievement in the more mechanical supporting skills of standard usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

Supportive Instructional Materials

Because the new grade eight CAP writing assessment represents a major departure for the California Assessment Program, members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee recommended that materials be developed to help districts prepare for the new writing test. To meet this practical need, CAP created a special document, *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[4]. The existence of enriching, framework-aligned supportive instructional material is another feature unique to the CAP writing assessment.

Rationale for the Assessment

To understand the new CAP writing assessment requires an understanding of the rationale behind it. The following rationale, which extends the description of the features that distinguish the CAP writing assessment from other programs, begins with an explanation of the assessment as a reflection of an enlarged, research-based approach to literacy education. This approach in turn relates

to the discourse theory that provides the foundation for the assessment and is briefly explained through reference to a communication triangle. The need for a more sophisticated theory and research-based view of literacy education is then related to society's need to prepare students for the twenty-first century through a well-balanced writing program. The significance of the four types of writing assessed in CAP's first statewide assessment is discussed in the report of results for each type of writing in chapters 4 through 7.

Research-based Approach

The CAP writing assessment is based on theory and research and a definition of writing that challenges what James Britton called in *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*[5] the "naive global sense of the ability to write." In *Research on Written Composition*[6], George Hillocks reported that the use of good pieces of writing as models remains an effective way to teach writing. Hillocks also reported that "scales, criteria, and specific questions which students apply to their own or others' writing also have a powerful effect on enhancing quality" (249). Identifying exemplary models and deriving instructionally useful criteria depend on a framework or typology for classifying the variety of types of writing. Such a classification scheme must be specific enough to allow useful, important, and practical distinctions between one type of writing and another to emerge.

Fortunately, such composition theorists as Moffett, Britton, and Kinneavy have begun to establish theoretical foundations for a needed schema of writing types based on whole writings that exist in the real world. Once a type of writing has been identified, a range of possible distinguishing characteristics and elements can be established for that type of writing so that useful criteria can be defined and exemplary, illustrative models identified for instructional purposes. Once students possess an understanding of how to make use of a variety of rhetorical elements in their writing (such as process narration of steps to implement a solution and anticipation of readers' objections in problem solution; or visual details, sounds or smells of a scene, dialogue, and specific narrative action in autobiographical incident), writing is demystified. The reasons for a particular grade on a paper should no longer puzzle a student. Instruction can become more focused and supportive of students' needs, opening up a broader range of rhetorical possibilities for students as they develop confidence in one type of writing and then another. Of course, elements of writing mastered for one type of writing can be used for other, related types of writing, as instruction moves across the range. Such an approach to writing instruction responds to Guideline Number Thirteen in the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide*[7]. Students, after having opportunities to build background, write in many different modes of discourse, such as story, observation, biographical sketch, poetry, dialogue, essays and report.

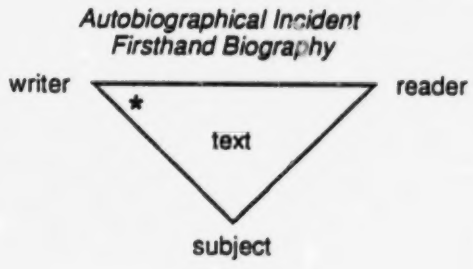
The creators of the CAP writing assessment believe that it is very important to increase teacher awareness of the genres in which teachers are operating as they teach children to read and write. One way to ensure that students can comprehend a type of writing is to insist that they have multiple experiences composing that type of writing. As students internalize the features inherent in a given type of writing, they will be better prepared to read and learn from that type. And they will be able to compose essays within a given type of writing only if they have had multiple opportunities to read selections of that type. The general theory and typology for the CAP writing assessment is derived from the work of many experts in the writing community, including those who have guided the work of the writing assessment conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (United States) and England's Assessment of Performance Unit (the agency responsible for conducting and reporting Great Britain's national assessment). The specific types identified for the grade eight CAP writing assessment were selected by members of the CAP Writing Assessment Advisory Committee, which consists of elementary and secondary school teachers; curriculum specialists; testing experts and administrators from school districts and offices of county superintendents of schools; university professors; and representatives from the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the National Center for the Study of Writing at the University of California (Berkeley), and the National Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature at the State University of New York at Albany.

Discourse Theory

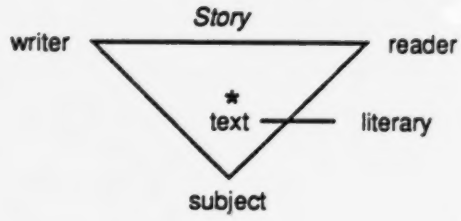
All types of writing can be located within a communication triangle in which the writer, subject, and audience represent the three points of the triangle. The type of writing emerges out of the writer's rhetorical purpose, knowledge of the subject, and awareness of the audience. Focus on the writer produces personal or expressive writing, such as autobiographical incident; on the subject, explanatory or expository writing, such as report of information; and on appeal to audience, argumentative writing, such as problem-solution and evaluation. Focus on the center of the triangle, the written text itself, produces literary or representational writing, such as a story, in which deeper levels of meaning can be detected, analyzed, and applied to the human condition. The eight types of writing selected for the grade eight writing assessment represent a variety of types of writing from the communication triangle to ensure that students are instructed across the discursive range.

Other writing assessments have recognized the need to assess more than one type of writing. Such programs typically establish three broad, umbrella-like categories of writing, such as persuasive, literary/imaginative, and explanatory writing. Reducing all types of writing to three general categories results in categories that are so broad as to be vague. What makes the CAP writing assessment unique is its specific categorization of writing types that allows for the generation of clusters of prompts and one scoring guide for each carefully defined type of writing. It removes vagueness from the broader categories and provides teachers and students of writing the kind of tailored information they need for improving achievement within each type of writing assessed without being limited or formulaic.

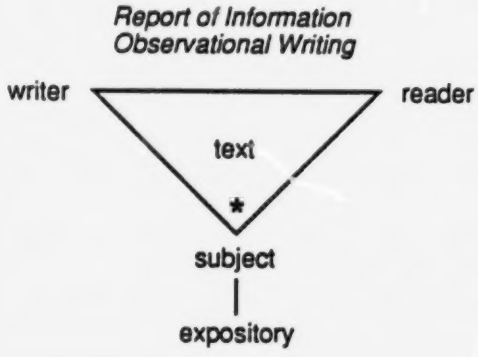
Two kinds of expressive writing



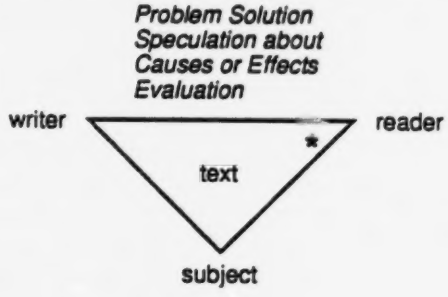
Presentational or literary writing



Two kinds of expository writing



Three kinds of persuasive writing



Preparation for Twenty-first Century

To function in the rapidly approaching twenty-first century in a job market that may consist largely of jobs that do not yet exist, students are going to need many flexible thinking/comprehension/composing abilities and a sound knowledge base about history, government, economics, science, literature, and mathematics. To ensure that a complete array of problem-solving and decision-making skills are taught, educators must assess a wide array of composing skills that require students to demonstrate their creative problem-solving abilities and to draw upon their learning in multiple content areas. An ethnically heterogeneous democracy demands greater sophistication in assessment to create an accountability system that tells the public and educators what they really need to know. In such an exemplary assessment, students cannot mask their knowledge or lack of it by filling in bubbles on a page. In a high-quality writing assessment, students must use language actively to display in public their own thinking and reasoning abilities as they proceed from premise to premise. If genuine educational reform is to be achieved, assessment must undergo the kind of reform that will encourage effective, well-balanced writing programs.

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1. Ernest L. Boyer. *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America.* New York: Harper & Row, 1983.
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6. George Hillocks, Jr. *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching.* Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communications Skills and the National Conference on Research in English, 1986.
7. *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.

Chapter 3

Development of Writing Assessment

The development of the California Assessment Program writing assessment involved (1) test development; (2) test administration and scoring; (3) reporting; and (4) assistance to districts.

Test Development

Test development involved selection of types of writing, development of prompts, and development of scoring guides:

Selection of Types of Writing

The first step in developing the writing assessment was to make a comprehensive list of the types of writing to be assessed. To assist in this effort, a comprehensive framework including types of writing that would be desirable in a complete writing curriculum was sought. This framework covered a broad range of types, including personal, expository (explanatory), presentational (imaginative), and persuasive writing. It was from the comprehensive list that the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee derived the types to be assessed in grade eight. Only continuing field testing and developmental work will disclose which types are ideally suited to a grade level. In the absence of such definitive information, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee identified the eight types of writing for grade eight using the following criteria:

- Emphasis of the best school writing programs. Would California's best teachers of writing at a certain grade be likely to assign a particular type of writing? The committee wanted to be certain that the best teachers would both value a type of writing and consider it central to the curriculum as suggested in the *Model Curriculum Standards*[1].

- Students' reading experiences. Would students read the types of writing on the list?

- Students' cognitive development. Would students be developmentally ready to engage in a particular type of writing?

- Curriculum sequence between grades three and twelve. Would a grade-level set of writing types appropriately follow an earlier set and at the same time prepare students for a later set? The committee also considered what kinds of writing and thinking are needed for success in other disciplines, such as history–social science and science.

- Appropriateness for testing. Would it be fair to expect students to compose a given type of writing in a 45-minute testing period? Song lyrics and poetry, while desirable in a complete writing curriculum, were judged as inappropriate types of writing to be assessed.

Development of Prompts

The first step in the development of writing tasks was to create a team of test developers, the CAP Writing Development Team. This group of outstanding California classroom teachers represents the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and a cross-section of geographical regions and constituencies throughout the state. This team has provided key leadership in both test development and staff development activities for California.

The development of prompts for this assessment has been comprehensive, rigorous, and painstaking. Initially, prompt development was conducted for grades eight and twelve simultaneously. Large numbers of prompts were collected from numerous sources, including California school district prompt collections, ETS advanced placement tests, other state assessment programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and California teachers' files. These prompts were first classified by the type of writing to be assessed. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee and several other groups were convened throughout the course of a year to develop prompts for the types of writing selected by the committee for grade eight and twelve to add to the prompt pool. In February, 1986, the CAP Writing Development Team was formed to contribute to the arduous test development effort needed for this project. Before meeting, the group reviewed all of the prompts in the prompt pool and wrote several new prompts. At their first meeting the CAP Writing Development Team and some members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee reduced the number of prompts from 300 to 156.

Eighty outstanding teachers were identified through the California Writing Project to participate in a special March, 1986, field study of the 156 prompts. The teachers administered two essay topics to 50 students per topic, helped the students complete a student questionnaire, examined the student essays and questionnaires, conducted student interviews about the prompts and the students' difficulties with them, summarized the information on teacher questionnaires for each of the two essay topics, and returned the materials for the scrutiny of the CAP Writing Development Team. The number of prompts was then reduced to 56 by the team members, who used carefully specified prompt revision guidelines. In addition, the prompts were checked against six criteria. Each prompt had to:

- Invite the desired type of writing. All or nearly all student essays are readily recognizable as the appropriate type.

- Engage the thinking, problem-solving, composing, and text-making processes central to the type of writing.

- Be an assignment that teachers would want to give their students.

- Be challenging for many students and easy for many students.

- Produce interesting, not just proficient, writing.

- Be liked by some students.

The prompts meeting these criteria were then subjected to a rigorous linguistic and cultural bias review in which the language content and content

of each prompt were carefully reviewed by representatives of several minority groups to ensure the accessibility of every prompt to all students. In addition, the prompts were subjected to an ETS (Educational Testing Service) sensitivity review.

Seven prompts for each of the eight types of writing were then field-tested. Every district that wished to participate in field testing was included, and a statewide sampling of 25,195 students resulted. The papers from the May, 1986, field test were then used for the development of the scoring guides, which were used for the preliminary scoring sessions conducted in the summer of 1986. Data and reader responses generated from the scoring sessions resulted in further feedback for continued refinement of the prompts. A final reading in December, 1986, resulted in additional feedback for final revisions of the grade eight prompts.

Scoring Guides

The CAP writing achievement scoring system evolved from a 1984 grade eight pilot project. Because the primary goal of the pilot project was to examine various writing assessment methodologies to determine the most appropriate approach for the California Assessment Program, several scoring systems were explored during this preliminary study.

A special ad hoc committee was constituted to resolve a number of complicated scoring issues that had arisen during the course of the grade eight pilot project. After a consideration of the instructional implications of each scoring system and the relationship of these to the *Model Curriculum Standards*[1], a three-part scoring system (rhetorical, feature and conventions) was created.

Members of the CAP Writing Development Team developed the scoring guides for the types of writing to be assessed for grade eight. The criteria and standards embedded in each scoring guide were derived from a careful study of each type of writing. Members of the CAP Writing Development Team first wrote on a given prompt from the array of prompts for each writing type. The teacher-created essays were then used as the basis for a discussion about the special characteristics of each type of writing as evidenced by those models. Using an abundance of student essays produced during the May field tests, members of the team continued an in-depth study of the essays to determine the special requirements and range of possibilities for each type of writing. Once the scoring guides were drafted, they were made available to the members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee for review. The scoring guides were then pilot-tested during central and regional field test scoring sessions in July, 1986. Reader responses from the scoring sessions provided useful feedback for continuing revision and refinement of the guides. In additional sessions throughout the fall of 1986, the work on the scoring guides was completed. The procedures previously described were used, and a final reading was done in December to test all three parts of the scoring system.

Test Administration and Scoring

In April-May, 1987, each of 268,719 students wrote an essay in response to one of 15 prompts representing four types of writing: autobiographical incident (five prompts); report of information (four prompts); problem solution (three prompts); and evaluation (three prompts). The CAP writing assessment was administered as part of the battery of tests constituting the *Survey of Academic Skills: Grade 8*[2]. The prompts were distributed randomly so that every student had an equal probability of receiving any one of the 15 prompts. Students were required to complete a student information form at the time of test administration. Examiners were instructed to allow a full 45 minutes of uninterrupted writing time for completion of the essay. Essay booklets were then returned to the primary contractor of the project, Educational Testing Service (ETS).

The essays were scored under the direction of ETS at four regional scoring centers: San Diego, Los Angeles, Walnut Creek, and Sacramento. One type of writing was scored at each scoring center: problem solution at Walnut Creek, report of information in Los Angeles, evaluation in Sacramento, and autobiographical incident at San Diego.

The following tabulation shows the number of scoring leaders and readers at each of the four centers and the number of booklets scored at each site.

Chart 3–1

Site	Prompts	Leaders*	Readers	Booklets**
San Diego	5	14	78	89,740
Los Angeles	4	12	65	72,094
Walnut Creek	3	8	53	53,659
Sacramento	3	8	52	53,222

*Chief readers, assistant chief readers and table leaders.
**Total number of booklets 282,155 plus 5 percent for the reliability study.

The scoring of 282,155 booklets was completed in eight days in July, 1987, by 290 readers and leaders. One of the chief readers captured the spirit of the CAP scoring sessions in a letter summarizing the group experience:

> Now, weeks after the CAP reading for Report of Information in Los Angeles, the memory of teachers working together in a collegial atmosphere on a project we all want to succeed is still vivid and clear. Nothing could have prepared me for the exhilaration which came from evaluating and helping others to evaluate student work. . . .
>
> Our table leaders were our magnificent models! Whether arguing a score point or explaining difficult ideas, the leaders were always professional, confident, secure, and positive. . . .
>
> Our readers were well-qualified, eager, and intelligent. For the most part, their feelings and ideas about CAP and the reading itself remained positive. Many readers noted that the most rewarding part of the reading, however, was meeting other teachers. Others remarked that "being able to see papers from across the state" was beneficial.
>
> The training materials used were excellent in all ways. The only complaints from the readers were that they could not take the materials home. Amid cries of "Let us keep the materials" and "Our schools need them," it was obvious that the readers found the training materials valuable and important to the scoring of the student papers as well as for future use. . . .
>
> Throughout our days together, good people worked with excellent materials for a goal that is larger than all of us combined—to make excellent writers of all the students in California.
>
> I am grateful that I am able to use CAP materials in my classroom, that I can share the information with others, that I have been able to work on the evaluation of the papers, that I am part of the CAP Writing Development Team, and that I am permitted to know and to work with such outstanding individuals.

Reporting of Test Results

The results of the grade eight writing assessment at the school level have been reported to all school districts in *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement*[3], a narrative report of school results designed for instructional use. A school and district report for the *Survey of Academic Skills: Grade 8 Writing Achievement*[3] is designed for reporting to the public, for making district and school comparisons, and for charting year-to-year progress.

A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement[3] is a significant departure for CAP in that it was specifically directed to teachers for the first time. Every grade eight teacher in California was provided with a copy. The report was tailored to the information needs of principals and classroom teachers and was not designed for comparison of schools or other external comparisons.

Assistance to School Districts

Because the new grade eight CAP writing assessment represented a major departure for the California Assessment Program, members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee recommended that materials be developed to help school districts prepare for the new writing test. For this purpose, a special document, the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[4], was created.

The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[4] was intended as the primary communication and staff development vehicle to acquaint administrators and teachers with the objectives of the writing assessment. This document contains eight writing

guides (one for each of the eight types of writing), the most useful part of the handbook for instruction. Each writing guide includes a discussion of the importance of the type of writing, the distinguishing features of the type, illustrative classroom writing assignments, including prompts that might be useful in science and history–social science classes, revision and editing guides, exemplary student essays and comments explaining the strengths of a given essay, an example of at least one published essay and comments, and a reading list of published works within each type.

The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[4] was intended to serve many audiences within the educational community. It includes a program overview for all audiences, management guidelines for administrators, a chapter on writing assessment and the curriculum for curriculum specialists, administrators and teachers, a chapter on students with special needs for teachers and administrators responsible for ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, and transparency masters to meet the communication needs of workshop presenters.

A special training of trainers conference was held in September, 1986, to inform staff development agencies statewide about the CAP assessment; its dimensions, purposes, and benefits, and its congruence with the *English–Language Arts Framework*[5]. The intent of the conference was to develop a corps of trainers to train educators statewide on the fundamentals of the CAP assessment. A total of 123 representatives from offices of county superintendents of schools and California Writing Project sites attended the two-day training session.

As a result of the training of trainers conference, participants received specific training in CAP's new writing assessment program. California Writing Project teacher/consultants were prepared to teach a cadre of teachers at each of 19 sites in October, 1986, in preparation for staff development requests from schools and school districts statewide. Through the efforts of the 19 California Writing Project sites, 7,304 teachers were involved in CAP in-service activities—a number that accounts for over half of the grade eight teachers in the state.

Participants became aware of the need for cooperation among California's staff development agencies in preparing districts for the CAP writing assessment. Regional planning groups, ranging from groups in which members had never talked together before to groups in which members simply polished their already extensive plans for joint staff development activities, demonstrated the need for improved communication and cooperation.

The author of a "Report on Training of Trainers" wrote that:

> The September training of trainers, sponsored by the Office of Staff Development and the Curriculum Implementation Center for English–Language Arts was a watershed! While we planned for a meeting of minds, we could not have anticipated the good will, the openness to issues and challenges, the joy that the participants found in talking and writing together. I believe that while there are still issues in direct writing assessment to be examined, these issues became opportunities for the September participants. I believe, too, that the spirit of working together to make this assessment the best it can be, of creating better schoolwide writing programs, of cooperating in the enormous training needs overrode any past controversies related to the assessment[6].

One hundred and twenty teachers, K–12, representing each of the state's six county superintendent areas, attended the 1987 summer institute of the California Literature Project. This, the third CLP institute held at UCLA, brought the number of teachers intensively trained in the research base and implementation strategies for the *English Language Arts Framework*[5] to 300. Included as an integral part of the training is the concept of classroom assessment that incorporates key features from the CAP writing assessment.

After the summer institute, advanced training for the 300 teachers has included the preparation of two teacher-to-teacher workshops on writing assessment so that all teacher/leaders are prepared to conduct such workshops in the future:

1. Extending and Assessing Learning is a workshop in which participants explore a variety and range of assessment strategies in a comprehensive English–language arts program.

2. Assignment to Assessment is a five-day advanced workshop specifically tied to the

CAP direct writing assessment. Participants develop instructional units embodying framework principles and using the kinds of writing tested by CAP, field-test them in their own classrooms, and revise them according to results gained with their own students.

As a part of the services provided to districts and schools, by the California Literature Project, approximately 500 teachers participated in these workshops in 1986-87. In partnership with the County-State Steering Committee, more of these workshops were conducted in 1987-88.

References

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2. *Survey of Academic Skills: Grade 8.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education.
3. *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
4. *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
5. *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
6. Mary Ann Smith. *Report on Training of Trainers.* Berkeley: Bay Area Writing Project, 1986 (unpublished).

Chapter 4

Writing Assessment: Autobiographical Incident

Chapters 4 through 7 report on the achievement of California grade eight students in the four distinctly different types of writing tested in April, 1987: autobiographical incident, evaluation, problem solution, and report of information.

Each chapter contains a description of the type of writing assessed, a chart summarizing statewide achievement in that type, and sample essays illustrating the full range of writing achievement. Each set of sample essays includes one essay for rhetorical effectiveness, score points 1 through 6. Each essay's score for a complementary writing feature and for conventions is also indicated. The three scores—for rhetorical effectiveness, feature, and conventions—are described in Chapter 8. Also in Chapter 8 achievement in the four types is compared, and statewide average scores combining rhetorical effectiveness scores for all four types of writing are presented.

In examining the sample essays in this chapter and in chapters 5 through 7, readers should keep in mind that the writers are thirteen years old. The best of them write exceptionally well but not nearly so well, of course, as outstanding high school seniors or college freshmen. It is crucial to remember, as well, that these are first-draft essays, written in 45 minutes, with limited time for planning and substantive revision. Readers should also recognize that a single essay at a score point illustrates only one way to demonstrate the level of achievement represented by that score point. Although the scoring system provides detailed criteria for achievement at each score point, there is no single formula for high achievement.

Description of Autobiographical Incident

In autobiographical incident writers tell a story from their personal experience. Besides narrating an incident, writers tell readers what it has meant to them, disclosing the autobiographical significance of the incident. Thus, while this type of writing draws on the natural storytelling skills of students, it also helps them gain perspective on their

personal experiences and find the form and words with which to share this understanding with others.

The best writers orient readers to the incident, present the scene and other people who were present, and then tell an engaging story that may include dialogue, movement or gestures, names of people or objects, and sensory details. Writers describe their remembered feelings, understandings, or reflections at the time of the incident; and they may also evaluate the incident from their present perspective, implying or stating its significance in their lives. The best writers use many of these strategies, selecting those appropriate to the writing situation. The challenge in writing autobiographical incidents is both to select the appropriate strategies from among this varied repertoire and to integrate them smoothly into a readable personal story. Writing engaging autobiographical incidents is as demanding as writing convincing arguments or insightful analyses of literature.

Autobiographical incident prepares students to do other types of writing. As students realize the validity of their own experiences, they can use personal anecdotes as persuasive evidence in support of their ideas. Some of the most convincing expository essays are those that draw on personal experience to support and develop generalizations. In fiction, the ideas for stories and characters are often found in one's own experiences. As students learn to use their own lives and their daily experiences as a resource for writing, they enrich all of their writing.

Writing Tasks

In the April, 1987, statewide test, students received one of five writing tasks centered on autobiographical incident. Each task focused on a particular type of remembered incident: a challenge at which they succeeded or failed, something special that happened once, a time when they were frightened, a memorable first experience, or a small incident that in retrospect seems significant.

Each task invited students to write about a single incident which occurred on one day or part of a day. They were encouraged to tell a lively story about this incident for specific readers mentioned in the writing task. They were reminded that their readers would expect them to reflect on the personal significance of the incident.

Achievement in Autobiographical Incident

Chart 4-1 summarizes the achievement of California grade eight students in writing autobiographical incidents. Nearly 50 percent could tell a readable story with a point, but only 14 percent could write an engaging, memorable story through diverse narrative strategies. Stories—personal and fictional—were a familiar genre to thirteen-year-olds. Nearly all students read autobiography and prose fiction. All students experience stories repeatedly in nonprint media—movies and TV dramas. From this experience with visual narratives, all students share a common basis for learning to write shaped, dramatic autobiographical incidents. To have any hope of fulfilling this promise, however, students must read and reread print narratives—published autobiography. They need to discuss with their teachers the features and strategies of autobiography, and they must write and revise their own personal stories.

Sample Essays

Score Point 6: Exceptional Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 6
Feature (Coherence): 6
Conventions: 6

2 percent of the students achieved this score.

This student writes about a deer hunting incident, a time when he first killed an animal. He keeps the focus on a single incident of short duration, working out in considerable detail the narrative and scenic possibilities of the incident. Through opening dialogue he successfully orients readers to the incident. The essay is well-paced and illustrates control of many of the features of a well-told autobiographical narrative: concrete visual details (sounds and smells); imagery, specific narrative action (movements of the narrator and deer); engaging beginning; and successful closure. The scene is vividly presented. At the end the writer comments on the significance of the incident.

Although an experienced reader can readily see other possibilities in this incident, this first-draft essay is a masterful performance for a young writer. The writer has learned how to present his remembered experiences thoughtfully and vividly.

Chart 4–1
Achievement in Autobiographical Incident

Score Point	Percentage of California Grade 8 Students*	Cumulative Percent	Description of Achievement
6 Exceptional Achievement	2.0	2.0	The student produces coherent, dramatically realized narrative which relies on a variety of appropriate strategies; successfully orients readers by presenting context, scene, and people; states or implies significance of the incident.
5 Commendable Achievement	11.8	13.8	The student produces coherent, engaging narrative which successfully orients readers; states or implies significance of the incident; lacks insight and range of strategies of the writer of a 6.
4 Adequate Achievement	32.3	46.1	The student produces a well-told incident that lacks the momentum and interest of a 5 or 6; orients readers adequately; states or implies significance but usually adds it to the end of the narrative.
3 Some Evidence of Achievement	34.9	81.0	The student produces narrative that is brief or rambling; limited statement or implication of signifcance.
2 Limited Evidence of Achievement	15.1	96.1	The student produces general or fragmentary narrative with little if any orientation or reflection on significance.
1 Minimal Evidence of Achievement	3.4	99.5	The student responds to prompt but with only the hint of a narrative.
No Response	0.2		
Off Topic	0.3		

*This column does not total to 100% because of rounding.

His control of narrative, pace, movement, and coherence is impressive. He can shift gracefully from moving the narrative forward to presenting the scene. His syntactic versatility and control of conventions would be the envy of many university freshmen.

Not Titled

"This your first time huntin'?" asked my older cousin Mark, as he pulled the two 9 mm rifles out of the back of his black Toyota truck.

"Yep. Grandpa just bought me a license two days ago," I replied as I pulled on the tan camoflauge vest I was holding in one hand.

"Alright then. I'll have to explain to you some details on how to hunt deer," he said, reaching over to me and stuffing a box of bullets into one of my vest pockets.

Mark proceeded to explain in lengthy detail on how to hunt deer. He also explained how to load, aim, and fire the gun. "Let's go!" He said when he

finished, and closed up the back of his truck. "When we enter the woods, we can't talk. I don't want to take any chances on scaring some prey."

I started into the woods, the first rays of morning poking up behind the purplish-colored mountains. I soon found an animal path leading in an east-west direction. I decided to follow it. Small animal tracks led this way and that along the trail, which disappeared ahead among the trees. I could smell evergreen, refreshing my senses and making myself glad that civilization had not yet reached this place.

The trail wound on, through patches of brush and a glade of small redwoods. I could hear the sounds of life everywhere, the birds chirping, the squirrels scampering above in the foilage, and a cow mooing somewhere close by.

Then the trail opened up into a meadow. I quickly hid myself among the trees at the edge of the clearing and examined it for deer.

I couldn't see any deer, just trailers of mist being drawn along by an invisible hand. The knee-high grass waved back and forth in a light breeze, making a pleasant rustling sound.

I was taking in the beauty of this place when a saw a movement in the grass. I slowly unslung my gun from my shoulder and aimed it at where I saw the movement. An agonizing two minutes later, the head of a deer poked up, its black nose sniffing for danger and its eyes darting around.

I slowly pulled the trigger, feeling the cold iron against my finger. Then, the gun kicked back against my shoulder, and a loud roar filled the air. I saw the deer's head snap back, and I saw its legs crumple beneath the weight of the now lifeless body.

I put my gun up against a young sapling, and i walked out into the meadow to look at my prize. Upon arriving where the deer lay, my whole attitude about hunting changed. I now saw the animal's glazed over eyes, staring out at the forest it would never see again. Clots of blood slowly oozed from the hole the bullet had made in its head. The nose that quivered was now still. The life of the deer had been discharged just as the bullet had been discharged from the gun.

It was the first time I had taken the life of an animal, and I doubt that I will do it again for a long, long time.

Score Point 5: Commendable Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 5
Feature (Coherence): 5
Conventions: 5

12 percent of the students achieved this score.

This student writes about the first time she rode a bicycle. Beginning very successfully, she tells an engaging, readable story about herself, a story that includes dialogue and action. Unlike the writer of the 6 essay, she does not develop the dramatic possibilities of her successful ride or give readers a good sense of a specific scene.

The errors are typical of first-draft writing and do not detract from the rhetorical effectiveness of the essay.

Not Titled

The wind blew the hair and the sweat off my face. I wiggled back and forth on the tiny seat. My knuckles were turning white from clenching so tightly to the handlebars. Then I fell off.

It was Christmas day as I struggled to climb back on my shiny new "big kid" two wheel bike.

I couldn't believe it! I actually had balanced myself on the bike for at least thirty seconds!

My mom came running down the street asking me if I was hurt. Just for a little symathy I said yes and forced a couple of tears down my cheek. That really got to my mom. She swooped me up into her arms and carried me back to the house, leaving the bicycle in the middle of the street.

She put me down on the couch and started arguing with my dad. She was saying things like "I knew we shouldn't have bought that bike, my baby is to little to ride it. She has already hurt herself."

I didn't hear my dad's side of the story because I was already outside picking up my bike. It was hard, but I managed to push it to the top of the hill.

I turned the bike around so it was facing the hill going downward and I climed on.

There I was, sitting on top of the world, just like in my dreams. I put my right foot on one petal, and my left foot on the other, and I was off! It was so exciting! I loved every second of it. When I eventually reached the bottom of the hill, I turned right around and when back up. Then I went down again, and again, and again. By this time my mom and dad were standing on the lawn in frontof our house.

They both had expressions on their faces. My dad's was proud, and my mom's was a little more worried. But deep down, I knew she was as proud of me as I was of myself. And I was quite proud of myself.

From that Christmas when I was seven years old to the Christmas I was twelve years old, they bike was my best friend!

The Christmas I was twelve, I got my ten-speed bike. And the story starts all over again.

I still have both bikes today, but my first one is in the attic waiting for my little cousin to grow in it.

Score Point 4: Adequate Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 4
Feature (Coherence): 4
Conventions: 5

32 percent of the students achieved this score.

This student writes about failing to meet a challenge. Although she reflects at length on the significance of the incident, she does not present a specific scene or develop the dramatic possibilities of the incident. The narration is flat and general.

A Challenge

A few weeks ago I was in a trak meet. It was a challenge for me. I was always used to being the best. This trak meet proved to me that I can't be best at everything.

I was excited and scared. All those people came out to watch. I began to visialize myself being humiliated and laughed at. What if I tripped? What if I was the last one to finish? I didn't have much support. Only a few of my friends were there. I saw my competition and began having doubts about whether I could still be the best. When we began, I was numb. I tried my hardest to get ahead. The person to my right was so close that I didn't have room to break ahead of her. Then we crossed the finish line. It was over. I got third place. I think back now, and I can't help wondering that if that girl had gotten out of my way, would I have come in first? At first, I was disappointed. I wasn't best anymore and that there were others better than I was. At running anyway. I felt that I had failed to meet my goal. Now, a week later, I think back and realize that I can't be perfect. I realized that there was still room for improvement. I'm just proud of the fact that I had enough guts to go through with the race, and I tried my best. That's all I can ask of myself. I hope there are more challenges in my future and I hope I will be able to meet most of them. Challenges bring excitement into my life and show me what I have to improve in. This test was a challenge. This one I met.

Score Point 3: Some Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 3
Feature (Coherence): 3
Conventions: 4

35 percent of the students achieved this score.

This student writes about the first time he achieved something memorable. There is context, narrative, commentary, and closure. Readers are prepared for concrete action (walking onto the mat, blowing a whistle, diving for the opponent's legs) but are then denied it.

This writer and the writer of the previous essay could benefit immediately from instruction in autobiographical writing. They have a sense of story but lack the strategies to present one vividly to readers. Both writers have better control of conventions than of rhetorical strategies, a recurring result in this assessment.

The First Time

The first time I won a first place medal for wrestling I was in the eight grade. My parents had come to watch me. I had won seconds before but this time I wanted the first. I won all of my mathes and worked my way into the finals. I had made it again and this time I was going to win. My opponent was shorter than me and I felt I had an edge. When I walked on to the mat I felt nervous and a little shaky. The wistle blew and I dove for his legs, and in the end came out with more points. I had won! I was proud of my self and so were my parents. I won the gold medial that is now hanging on my wall. Now this summer I'm going to go to a wrestling camp so I can have that feeling more often. The feeling of being strong, the feeling of being a winner!

Score Point 2: Little Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 2
Feature (Coherence): 1
Conventions: 2

15 percent of the students achieved this score.

Writing about an incident that frightened him, this student is unable to follow through on a strong beginning. Although the action can be followed,

coherence is shaky. And errors detract from the narrative's effectiveness.

Not Titled

Well one day , a couple of years ago, I asked my mom if I could go to my friends house, and she said yes you may but be home by 5:00 pm. I was riding my bike down the road and I ran over a rattle snake. It was a Diamond back. I thought that it was bad luck to run over any animal on a bicycle. But I kept on going.

Later on my way home I had to cross the highway and when I did a car came speeding down the road and almost hit me, it missed me by about one foot or less. I crashed and cut my arm and one fingernail came close to comeing of so I went home as fast as I could and my mom took me to the hospital and they gave me a shot to make it stop hurting and that bandaged me up and when I was healed, I never was that careless again.

Score Point 1: Minimal Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 1
Feature (Coherence): 1
Conventions: 2

3 percent of the students achieved this score.

This student does not focus on a single memorable first experience. There is only the hint of a story for the dog-bite incident, and sentence errors cause readers to stumble. This essay is centered on the topic but does not show that the writer understands narration.

First Experiences

I got my first experience riding a bicycle, it was fun until I fell and hurt my self, then I tried again, I did it! Then when I was nine I got bitten by a dog it was a experience, my whole right hand was bleeding, raned home. When I was twelve the dog that bit me died at the school.

Teachers' Comments on Achievement on Autobiographical Incident

California classroom teachers wrote comments like the following after reading thousands of autobiographical-incident essays during the summer, 1987:

Kids need to work on engaging openings and selecting appropriate details. They need to take risks.

I am reminded how important it is for students to identify a rich incident, develop it as fully as possible, and gracefully integrate narration and reflection.

Students need instruction on writing as a process and on how to incorporate 'show, not tell' techniques so that incidents are livelier. They should be made aware of authentic voice in their writing.

I can help my students improve their story lines and avoid digressions.

I was impressed with the quality of writing of many of the students. They had such diverse styles and unique ways of expressing themselves. With a little guidance, writers of the weaker papers have the potential to improve.

The best papers continue to demonstrate what we all know about autobiography: concreteness, specificity and careful focus are important and can be taught. Scoring the papers has sharpened my understanding of "incident."

I will be more direct in my instruction of what an incident is (in terms of short, concentrated duration of time); I will also continue to stress diverse narrative approaches.

We have taught many students to write papers that are "correct" but they are dull to the point of tears. I believe, though, that eighth graders can learn to write well, not just adequately.

Chapter 5

Writing Assessment: Evaluation

Evaluators make judgments about the worth of a subject (a book, movie, restaurant, musical group) and then support their judgment with reasons, attempting to convince the reader of the soundness of the judgment. They may support their evaluations both by means of personal anecdote and external knowledge and authority, drawing on what they read and what other people say about a subject.

Making evaluations is a common experience in an adult's life. Every day we evaluate a wide range of subjects. For example, we evaluate the way we feel when we wake up and the way we look when dressed for work. We may also evaluate competing candidates for political office, controversial issues of national importance, the worth of certain consumer products, or different vacation spots. Our soundest judgments are based on criteria appropriate to the subject.

In evaluative writing grade eight students are asked to go beyond their immediate and perhaps superficial reactions to a given subject. Students consider possible criteria on which to base an evaluation, analyze their subjects in light of the criteria, and select evidence that clearly supports their judgments. The demands of working out a thoughtful written evaluation provide students with practice in confronting the increasingly complex choices in their lives.

Growing toward adulthood, students will be faced with making significant evaluative decisions—whether to go to college, what job to take, where to live. Exploring decisions in writing can help writers to focus on several aspects of evaluating a situation before they make a final decision. The processes to be learned through writing effective evaluation, then, go far beyond a classroom essay; they have lifelong implications.

Writing Tasks

In the April, 1987, statewide test, students wrote an essay for one of three writing tasks. For each task students were asked to identify something they especially liked and to say why they liked it.

In one task students were asked to write a letter to a favorite author telling why they especially liked one of the author's books. In another task students were asked to write an essay explaining why they enjoyed one television program more than any others. And in the third task students were asked to write an essay justifying their preference for a particular type of music.

All the writing tasks identified particular readers: a teacher, local television station staff, a favorite author. The tasks emphasized that students must give reasons and evidence to support their judgments about their favorite authors, TV programs, or music. The tasks made clear that students must argue convincingly for their preferences and not just offer unsupported opinions.

In the April, 1988, assessment, students were asked to evaluate unfamiliar poems as well as other literary works assigned in their English classes.

Achievement in Evaluation

Chart 5-1 summarizes the achievement of grade eight students in evaluation. Nearly all students understand that an evaluation requires a judgment. Many students understand, as well, that giving a reason is the first step in making an argument. Everyday conversational arguments with parents of friends involve asserting judgments and giving reasons. The essentials of written evaluations, however—support or evidence for a reasoned argument justifying a judgment—seem to be understood by only 35 percent of the students tested, those scoring 6, 5, or 4. Very few students (only 9 percent) can write a developed, coherent, engaging evaluation.

Sample Essays

Score Point 6: Exceptional Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 6
Feature (Coherence): 5
Conventions: 6

0.5 percent of the students achieved this score.

Although a novel beginning is not essential to success in an evaluation essay, one has to be impressed by the confidence of a thirteen-year-old writer who can, in a timed test, begin with dialogue and anecdote. This essay illustrates, incidentally, how narrative strategies developed through autobiographical writing can be useful in argumentative or persuasive writing. Although the subject of this evaluation is not known at once, it soon becomes known as the writer segues gracefully from anecdote to judgment. The writer gives two reasons why she favors rock music—it helps her manage her feelings and it presents appealing messages. She supports the first of these reasons with an anecdote, and the second with an example. The essay is coherent, even with the risks it takes rhetorically, and it demonstrates near mastery of conventions.

Rock Around the Clock

"Well, you're getting to the age when you have to learn to be responsible!" my mother yelled out.

"Yes, but I can't be available all the time to do my appointed chores! I'm only thirteen! I want to be with my friends, to have fun! I don't think that it is fair for me to baby-sit while you go run your little errands!" I snapped back. I sprinted upstairs to my room before my mother could start another sentence. I turned on my radio and "Shout" was playing. I noted how true the song was and I threw some punches at my pillow. The song ended and "Control", by Janet Jackson came on. Halfway through the song, I stopped beating my pillow. I suddenly felt at peace with myself. The song had slowed me down. I pondered briefly over all the songs that had helped me to control my feelings. The list was endless. So is my devotion to rock music and pop rock. These songs help me to express my feelings, they make me wind down, and above all they make me feel good. Without this music, I might have turned out to be a violent and grumpy person.

Some of my favorite songs are by Howard Jones, Pet Shop Boys, and Madonna. I especially like songs that have a message in them, such as "Stand By Me", by Ben E. King. This song tells me to stand by the people I love and to not question them in times of need. Basically, this song is telling me to believe in my friends, because they are my friends.

My favorite type of music is rock and pop rock. Without them, there is no way that I could survive mentally. They are with me in times of trouble, and, best of all, they are only a step away.

Chart 5–1
Achievement in Evaluation

Score Point	Percentage of California Grade 8 Students*	Cumulative Percentage	Description of Achievement
6 Exceptional Achievement	0.5		The student produces convincingly argued evaluation; identifies a subject, describes it appropriately, and asserts a judgment of it; gives reasons and specific evidence to support the argument; engages the reader immediately, moves along logically and coherently, and provides closure; reflects awareness of reader's questions or alternative evaluations.
5 Commendable Achievement	8.1	8.6	The student produces well-argued evaluation; identifies, describes, and judges its subject; gives reasons and evidence to support the argument; is engaging, logical, attentive to reader's concern;is more conventional or predictable than the writer of a 6.
4 Adequate Achievement	25.5	34.1	The student produces adequately argued evaluation; identifies and judges its subject; gives at least one moderately developed reason to support the argument; lacks the authority and polish of the writer of a 5 or 6; produces writing that, although focused and coherent, may be uneven; usually describes the subject more than necessary and argues a judgment less than necessary.
3 Some Evidence of Achievement	42.4	76.5	The student states a judgment and gives one or more reasons to support it; either lists reasons without providing evidence or fails to argue even one reason logically or coherently.
2 Limited Evidence of Achievement	19.2	95.7	The student states a judgment but may describe the subject without evaluating it or may list irrelevant reasons or develop a reason in a rambling, illogical way.
1 Minimal Evidence of Achievement	3.6	99.3	The student usually states a judgment but may describe the subject without stating a judgment; either gives no reasons or lists only one or two reasons without providing evidence; usually relies on weak and general personal evaluation.
No Response	0.3		
Off Topic	0.5		

*This column does not total to 100% because of rounding.

Score Point 5: Commendable Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 5
Feature (Coherence): 6
Conventions: 6

8.1 percent of the students achieved this score.

Although this essay opens and closes confidently (if repetitively), it does not give much

evidence to support its judgment. The writer tells us that he values television programs offered by the Public Broadcasting System because they are informative, refers to two specific shows ("Nova" and "Newton's Apple"), mentions one episode of "Nova," but then stops short of providing concrete evidence from one or more episodes to illustrate the basis for his judgment. Still, this essay ranks high. It includes examples and contrasts, and its use of language is impressive.

Not Titled

I do a lot of television watching, and basically I watch shows that are adventurous, educational, and scientific shows that explore and lead me to new discoveries that take place everyday in the fields of computer technology and science. I like to be informed of these things that affect us very much in the everyday world. So I often tune to PBS for programs that cover these things. Nova, for example, is a show that explores the wonder of technology. There was an episode that I really liked. That particular episode discussed how special effects are made in movies such as Star Wars and Indiana Jones, interesting things I never knew before. Another program on the same channel, Newton's Apple, which consisted of questions and answers, facts. The same series range from space explorations, computers to the law of relativity. A feature of its episode is that they take us back in time to see the inventions that never went into use.

I like these shows because they are always interesting and educational. A lot of other shows usually feature comedy, sex and violence. I do not get total enjoyment from these shows. Rather than watching these programs that do not add to my knowledge, I would watch shows like Nova, Newton's Apple and other shows PBS has to offer that open up my mind.

Score Point 4: Adequate Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 4
Feature (Coherence): 5
Conventions: 5

25.5 percent of the students achieved this score.

This essay's opening and closing frame it effectively. The writer mentions several reasons for liking "Miami Vice" but provides evidence for only one reason—clothing styles. The writer contrasts two characters and writes enthusiastically.

Friday Night Television

Today is Friday. What's on T.V.? As I flip through the T.V. guide I see all the listings of all the days. Now I'm on the section marked Friday. From seven o'clock to nine o'clock there isn't much on. Hey! Wait a second! Look, at ten o'clock Miami Vice is on. I love that show! You want to know why? Well it's the style of the show. It has a certain fashion of clothes that each character wears. Like, one character, Sonny Crockett. He wears white cotton pants or any light wearing, light colored pants. Then theres a terquois or pink, light pink, shirt along with a sports' jacket.

Ricardo Tubbs on the other hand wears two-piece suits. His colors are usually dark blue, black, and tan. Tubbs wears jwelery. Necklaces to be exact. His best one is a small chain that has a charm hanging form it that says EGOT. That stands for Emily, Graney, Oscar, and Tony.

The show is packed full of action. Usually it revolves around cocain dealers. Crockett and Tubbs are plain clothed cop out to get them all. Sometimes the show is quite serious and other times it is funny. But what rally makes Miami Vice are the actors.

Well, I wonder what I'm going to watch tonight. Maybe I'll watch Miami Vice!

Score Point 3: Some Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 3
Feature (Coherence): 4
Conventions: 5

42.4 percent of the students achieved this score.

The writer expresses a judgment about a TV show ("Moonlighting"), but he only lists reasons without arguing any of them with evidence or examples. There are more generalizations (TV is funny, sad, happy, humorous) than illustrations. Although it is brief, however, the essay is focused, coherent, and purposeful. It reveals the rudiments of evaluation.

My Favorite Television Program

Almost all the world watches Television. It has become a past time for me. I enjoy watching television because some of it can be funny, some can be sad, some can be happy. Of all the television programs I watch, my favorite is a show called "Moonlighting". It is a show about two people who run a detective agency. Their names are David Addison and Maddie Hayes. Their lifestyles are completely different. She is well-mannered. He is immature. I have a particularly favorite episode. They have to find a missing dead body!!

That particular episode was very funny. I like to watch T.V. shows with humor in it. Moonlighting is a very good program. It has humor, suspense, murders, disappearances, and action. It is, in my opinion, the best show on television today.

Score Point 2: Limited Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 2
Feature (Coherence): 4
Conventions: 2

19.2 percent of students achieved this score.

This writer offers only an implied judgment (The book was "fairly easy to read") and then only an implied argument. The writer summarizes the book so handily that readers infer it must have been easy to read. And the writer relies on summary rather than on explicit argument supported by criteria-based reasoning and evidence.

Not Titled

Dear Author

Just recently I have read a book. It was fairly easily to read this particular book was called "Kick Of". It was about a boy named Bradley but his friends call him Brad. Brad was from a foriegn land called England. Their Brad was a fabulous socar player. His mom and dad met in England also at a airport. Brad's father was a airline pilot in the Air Force. Then at the age of ten Brad moved to the States of the United States. At the age of ten he moved to Miami Florida were he had no friends. Then his father got moved to Pineville. It was a desolate area it had lots of trees. When Brad got their he was bored so he climed a tree not knowing his soccer ball was still on the ground. The people he met were Christine and her brother. They weren't the best people around they were not nice. The neat thing you new is that they were trying to take Brads soccer ball. Then Christine gave Brad a real shiner. Brads parents wanted him to stay out of trouble so they put him into football he played firststring, second, special team, then Beach. The coaches son wasn't making filgoals so he put Brad in and he made the goals. And they won the championship.

Score Point 1: Minimal Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 1
Feature (Coherence): 2
Conventions: 2

3.6 percent of students achieved this score.

This writer does identify a subject (classical rock) and makes a judgment about it. He also gives reasons but does not develop any of them.

Not Titled

My Favorite music is classical, rock. I like it because it coulms you down and you can enjoy it. I also can be enjoying when you have a party or just have people over. When there's nothing to do just turn on the radio and relax such as read a book or go to sleep. Also when you have a friend over you just can turn the music on and just play a game or watch tv. That's why the music is made for.

Teachers' Comments on Achievement in Evaluation

California classroom teachers wrote comments like these after reading thousands of evaluation essays during summer 1987:

> I was pleased to see that so many teachers scoring essays with me crave evidence in students' evaluation papers. I was also pleased to see that teachers hate to read generic papers.
>
> Students generally need to develop skills in giving evidence to support their judgments. I plan to spend more time on these thinking skills next year.

Writing evaluations, students need to know that they must use an active voice, take a firm stand, and then support their stand. Wishywashiness is out!

Students need a lot of practice in a variety of writing types. They need careful and personal feedback about their writing, and they need teachers who fully understand what makes a certain type of writing work and who can explain it to students.

Evidence of clear thinking was heavily rewarded in our scoring.

With evaluative writing, a plan is of utmost importance. Those papers that fell short were the ones with obviously no planning in the prewriting period—writing off the top of the head.

Seeing how the scoring worked and using the scoring guide made me see that students need a lot of practice in a variety of writing, and they need teachers who fully understand what makes a certain type of writing work and are able to explain it to students.

I think good evaluative writing is difficult even for good students. As I see it, most kids have trouble doing more than just summarizing. They need to learn to develop substantial reasoning behind why they like or dislike something.

I still need to work with my students on rhetorical stance, developing an awareness of one's audience, and on voice.

I have already used a scoring rubric for major writing assignments like the term paper. The scoring session convinced me to more widely apply the rubric concept to a greater variety of my assignments and give the rubric to my students.

The scoring session deepened my conviction that student texts need to be evaluated developmentally. We need to focus as much or more on the emergent (sometimes abortive) features of student writing as we do on the fully developed features.

I know good writing is damn difficult to do and damn rare. I know kids need to practice it more and see good models of evaluative essays in order to do better.

I am struck by how much some students can accomplish in 45 minutes; how well they can sometimes marshall the ideas; and with how much flair and sparkle they can express themselves. I am also struck with how superficial and vacuous some of their reasoning is.

More emphasis should be placed on critical thinking skills, supporting judgments, and tying thoughts and ideas together. Far too many papers digress, summarize, underdevelop, or state totally irrelevant facts.

Chapter 6

Writing Assessment: Problem Solution

Problem solution asks the writer to define a problem, propose one or more solutions, and convince the reader of the feasibility of the solutions. In writing about a problem and its solutions, students are inevitably drawn into cause-and-effect thinking about the history and consequences of the problem. They may have to argue that the problem exists and is serious. Proposing a solution, students may need to narrate a step-by-step plan for implementing it. They must convince readers of the possibility of the solution and perhaps even persuade them to act. In doing so, they must consider readers' objections and weigh the merits of alternative solutions. In all these ways, problem solution provides grade eight students with an introduction to the complexities of argumentative writing. Any problem solution essay—even one based on a familiar school or community problem—can be a sustained and realistic exercise in problem solving and critical thinking.

Engaging students in this kind of writing moves them toward analyzing problems and evaluating solutions to problems in their own lives and toward becoming active participants in resolving problems in their immediate communities.

Writing Tasks

In the April, 1987, statewide writing assessments, students responded to one of three writing tasks. Each task posed a familiar school problem and directed students to propose a solution to it for particular readers.

In one task students wrote a letter to a group of parents working to make school lunches more appealing and nutritious. Students were asked to explain why most students disliked the lunches and propose a solution to the problem. The task emphasized the importance of convincing parents to take the proposed solution seriously.

In another task students wrote a letter to the school principal suggesting a solution to the problem of school litter. The principal had invited students to propose solutions because he had been unsuccessful in solving the problem himself. Students were asked

to explain how the problem developed and why it seemed to them so difficult to solve. Then they were instructed to propose a solution, show how it might be implemented, and argue for its efficacy. The writing situation called for giving tactful advice to a reader who would be receiving many alternative, competing solutions.

In the third task students wrote a letter to a student council representative explaining what students disliked about school dances and proposing a way to improve the dances. They were encouraged to describe the solution so that the reader could see how it might be implemented and to argue convincingly that it was workable and superior to other possible solutions.

Achievement in Problem Solution

Chart 6-1 summarizes statewide achievement in writing essays to solve problems. Nearly all students recognize a problem solution writing situation and can come up with some kind of solution to a problem. At least 40 percent of students (those scoring 4, 5, or 6) know that a solution cannot merely be mentioned but must be described and argued for. Only 10 percent of students (scores of 5 and 6), however, are able to develop extended, convincing arguments for solutions, arguments reflecting continual awareness of readers' objections, preferences, and values. Problem solution, a remarkably reader-centered and action-oriented type of argument, challenges thirteen-year-olds to analyze their readers and develop an argumentative strategy the readers will find convincing.

Sample Essays

Score Point 6: Exceptional Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 6
Feature (Coherence): 5
Conventions: 4

0.7 percent of the students achieved this score.

Although lapses in conventions occasionally divert the reader, this essay reflects a comprehensive, thoughtful analysis of the rhetorical solution. The writer is especially sensitive both to her reader (the principal) and to those (like teachers and sports team members) who will be affected by her proposed solutions. She successfully establishes common ground with the principal, aligning herself perhaps too closely with his values; and yet she sets out realistic solutions which will nevertheless be a challenge for him to implement. She opens her letter very engagingly, forecasts her argument precisely, and then closes effectively. Although each of the four solutions might have been described and argued more fully, this essay is impressive. She dismisses an alternative solution (after-school detention) and throughout considers objections to her own proposed solutions.

Litter

Dear Mr. Lucklow,

I am a concerned student who is very upset with our school litter problem. I know you've tried many times unsuccessfully to punish kids you've seen littering by giving them after school detention. Everyday I tell the kids who I see littering to pick it up and throw it in the trash but they just say, "Oh don't worry about it, a janitor will pick it up later." So if you are open for any suggestion on how to encourage the kids to put their trash in the trash can, where it belongs, I would like to give you some of my suggestions. They are; to cut field trips, mention it on their report cards, keep the kids you catch littering from doing sports they are involved with, and to have more lunch duty people.

Now I know these ideas may seem a little extreme, but I think you should give it a try.

The suggestion about mentioning the litter problem on their report cards may not be to great, but I think the parents might take a little more concern about the environment their kids work and play in.

I know we don't take too many field trips, either, but the ones we take are really quite interesting and I know the kids really enjoy them. I think this solution and the one involving cutting them from their sport activities will be the most successful ones of which I have mentioned.

Now the one about kicking them off their sport activity will not be on a permanent basis, but if it was for a few weeks I think it would teach them a lesson that would last for the whole year.

My suggestion about having more lunch duty patrolers would mean more teachers wouldn't have as long of break as usual, but if you explained the situation to them I'm sure they would understand and could work out a schedule were they would only have to patrol once or twice a week.

I hope you will take all of these suggestion to

Chart 6–1
Achievement in Problem Solution

Score Point	Percentage of California Grade 8 Students*	Cumulative Percentage	Description of Achievement
6 Exceptional Achievement	0.7		The student describes the problem fully and argues for its seriousness; argues convincingly for one or more solutions to a problem; reflects continual awareness of readers' objections and preferred alternative solutions.
5 Commendable Achievement	9.3	10.0	The student describes the problem adequately for intended readers and argues convincingly for at least one solution; reflects readers' concerns but without the continual reader awareness of the writer of a 6.
4 Adequate Achievement	29.6	39.6	The student describes the problem briefly and offers at least one relevant, moderately developed solution; may mention the reader in the beginning but usually does not mention the reader again until the conclusion; is more matter of fact and noticeably less convincing than the writer of a 5 or 6.
3 Some Evidence of Achievement	39.9	79.5	The student identifies a problem and offers at least one minimally developed solution; may mention readers but usually does not accommodate them.
2 Limited Evidence of Achievement	16.7	96.2	The student mentions a problem and lists one or more solutions without arguing for them; usually does not mention readers.
1 Minimal Evidence of Achievement	3.2	99.4	The student usually mentions a problem but may not identify one explicitly; either does not offer a solution or mentions one and does not argue for it or argues for it illogically; proposes a solution that may not seem appropriate for problem; shows little or no awareness of readers.
No Response	0.2		
Off Topic	0.5		

*This column does not total to 100% because of rounding.

your consideration and think about the pros and cons of each one. If you do like these suggestions, I was thinking of writing them in the school newspaper. I know the students will probably be disappointed with some of these suggestions, but I think it will make them take the problem of littering into consideration more than they have in the past.

I'm sure you will do your part in this problem and I will do mine by throwing away my trash and I'm sure my friends will too. I thank for your time in reading my letter.

Score Point 5: Commendable Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 5
Feature (Coherence): 5
Conventions: 5

9.3 percent of the students achieved this score.

This focused, well-argued essay opens attractively, keeps its focus, and closes appropriately. Instead of proposing an immediately practicable solution, the writer calls for reforms to get at the root of the problem. We can imagine a harried principal admiring this reflective approach to a pressing problem but doubting whether he or she can wait until the proposed solution can be implemented.

Not Titled

Dear Mr. Lucklow,

We have a serious problem here at out school and that problem is litter. Everyday I see my fellow students throw their soft-drink cans and half-eaten unwanted food under the bleachers, to the side of walkways, or just anywhere they happen to be, no matter how close to a garbage can they are. In some cases it has become a kind of game or contest to find the most unusual place for their trash, over looking the most sensible place, the garbage can.

I think that the root of this problem is the all around lack of pride that the students have in the school. If they began to think that the school was a reflection of themselves, just as a home or room is a reflection of themselves, perhaps they would begin to take a little bit more pride in their surroundings. Perhaps working to make its appearance presentable

One way to acheive this sense of pride is to let the students have an active roll in school desisions that affect them directly. That is, provide the students with the responsibility so that they know that if they don't keep the school clean it makes them look irresponsible.

Desisions that the students could make for example might be entertainment programs such as talent shows and dances that are mostly for the student's benifit. Give them the things that they like; i.e fruit juices and other items in the cafeteria, so that school is a place that they look forward to going, not a place that they don't care about and do not want to go to.

Once you have a system in which the students a faculty work hand i hand and student ideas are given an equal chance then the faculty requests, like a clean campus will be taken seriously. I hope that you consider the options I have presented to you with all fairness, as I believe that they are the solution to your problem.

Score Point 4: Adequate Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 4
Feature (Coherence): 4
Conventions: 4

29.6 percent of the students achieved this score.

Beginning and ending perfunctorily, this writer lists several suggestions for improving school dances but does not argue for any of them convincingly. She misses an opportunity to emphasize the interrelatedness of her solutions, as a chain-of-reasoning argument. The writer does, however, understand the rudiments of recommending solutions to a problem for a particular reader.

Not Titled

Dear Stacy,

I am writing you this letter to give my feelings on the school dances. I feel there is many things we can do to improve our dances since many students have been complaining about the dances lately. I feel if we all work together we can make the dances better.

Many students want the dances to start at a later time so they can have time to go home and get ready. Having the dances right after school makes that kind of hard and I think longer dances would persuade more students to come so they could have a longer time to socialize and dance. A hour and a half is really too short of a time. I also think we need more dances. If we had a dance once a month it would give the students a much better chance to make it to the dances.

We need to try to get more people to come to the dances. I think by maybe having raffles and publicizing the dances more it would attract more students. Free refreshments might be a little token to add in there and tell the D.J. to listen to more of the students request because it seem like he plays the music he wants to listen to.

These are just some of my suggestions to improve the dances. Theres probably a few more things we can do to improve them and I'm sure if we all work together we can.

Score Point 3: Some Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 3
Feature (Coherence): 3
Conventions: 2

39.9 percent of the students achieved this score.

Although readers (parents) are addressed in this essay, they are not really considered seriously. The problem of unattractive cafeteria food is dramatized with the anecdote of the poisoned student, but the remainder of the essay fails to realize this promising beginning. The solutions are not convincing because they are unrealistic.

Not Titled

Dear Parents,

The kids of our school don't like the food here, because the food don't taste good. It's greasy, burned, & also has wierd things in it, that our school calls meat. Certain kid say they felt sick after one of the meals. He went home sick & didn't come back for a week. We all wondered what happened to him. We later found out he was poisoned. He came out ok but he told the kids what happened and there all afraid to eat in our lunch-room. That's why they go to our local stores for food & candy.

I suggest that you protest, & demand to know the company who we get our food from & demand that our school will stop ordering from that company & start from another. If they deny your request take your kids out of our school & put them in another until they will change the food company. Another thing they can do is put fancier ontreis on their. Maybe some candy or other things like ice cream, cake, or maybe even pie. This will get the kids attention & they will forget about the food poisoning thing & start to buy the lunches that are still nutritous but, also have some sweets in it.

I hope you will pick on of these suggestions so our kids from our school will start to eat lunch instead of wasting it on candy. If you pick one of the suggestions & the kids don't come to school or eat in are lunchroom we will have to close the school down.

Score Point 2: Limited Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 2
Feature (Coherence): 3
Conventions: 2

16.7 percent of the students achieved this score.

This essay identifies a problem and proposes a solution, but neither is developed.

Not Titled

Stacey Green

Our school dances are too short and no one can dance long enough to even get tired. The principal won't make them any longer because he thinks that someone will get int a fight.

I'm afraid to talk to him because he is not the kind of person to give suggestions to, so I'll give you some now. I think we can make the dances go at least to 10:00 pm and that will give us some time to dance.

I also think maybe we can make them start earlier. Maybe at 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. I hope we can work something out

Score Point 1: Minimal Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 1
Feature (Coherence): 2
Conventions: 1

3.2 percent of the students achieved at this score.

This writer can only echo the problem in the solution: small meals should be bigger.

Not Titled

Dear Parents

I know you are conserned about the students meals in our school Cafeteria.

The reason why in over cafeteria is cause it's not good, the meals we have are not big enough. I think you should give us biger meals. This is the only way to slove the solution we have

Teachers' Comments on Achievement in Problem Solution

California classroom teachers wrote comments like these after reading thousands of problem solution essays during the summer, 1987:

Problem solution is directly applicable to real life. All thinking adults need to be able to think a problem through and write logically about it.

I'm going to work on making sure my students address the problem, think imaginatively about solutions, and argue convincingly for their solutions.

I see endless possibilities for this type of writing in other areas: social studies, math, science.

The all-purpose five-paragraph form is not the way to approach this type of writing. Students must be encouraged to take on the problem and really try to solve it.

Students need to write on a variety of topics to a variety of audiences.

I think the scoring session taught the value of teaching brainstorming and mapping. A clear, well-organized response can be very pedestrian. Brainstorming helps students find lively ideas. Organization with little content is deadly.

I learned exactly what a 6 is: highly developed, oriented to readers, etc., so I'll be teaching more directly to that goal.

The scoring session gave me an opportunity to see a wide range of student writing with which to compare my students' writing. It did reaffirm my commitment to instruction in the process of writing.

Eighth graders need more instruction and practice in writing. They also need individual responses from teachers and small student groups.

Kids need more practice in debating issues; they often don't know how to argue a point of view.

This type of writing, problem solution, is applicable to social studies. It is especially relevant to issues involving constitutional rights.

To do well with this type of writing, kids need to be shown what is expected and how to accomplish it.

I'm going to work on making sure students address the problem, think clearly about solutions, and bring about good conclusions.

Chapter 7

Writing Assessment: Report of Information

Report of information makes special demands of writers. They must present themselves as authorities on a subject, seeking to impress readers with their knowledge and understanding. They select and present enough specific details of a subject to characterize it for readers. They orient readers to a subject, keep them on track with a coherent report, and then close the essay in a satisfying way. The best reports of information go still further to express the writer's involvement with the subject and commitment to sharing it with readers. The best reports also have a controlling idea, which provides coherence and focus for the essay.

Report of information is sometimes called explanatory or expository writing. It involves the full range of writer's strategies for presenting information: anecdotal narration, process narration, description, illustration, definition, classification, and comparison/contrast. Because it has no inherent logic (like argument), it makes special demands on writers for organizing information—for finding a workable plan to inform readers efficiently. The writer must steadily consider how much readers already know on the topic and at what rate and by what means new information can be introduced. Writers must also provide all the obvious cues readers require to stay on track as they process unfamiliar information—cues like forecasting and transitions.

In reporting information, writers are concerned primarily with informing rather than persuading readers to take action, justifying judgments or opinions, or presenting autobiographical disclosures. We find reports of information in textbooks, research reports, technical manuals, and newspapers and magazines. We also find them in letters and essays presenting information about familiar activities and places. Reporting information encompasses much of the reading and writing students will do in school and college and on the job.

Writing Tasks

In the April, 1987, assessment, students were assigned one of four writing tasks within report of information. Each task required students to present school or community information to particular readers. For example, they were asked to describe their hometowns to friends of the same age who were moving to the towns, detail the activities of a favorite class for Canadian students, introduce a favorite activity to other students unfamiliar with the activity, or describe their schools to friends of the same age who were transferring to the schools.

All tasks emphasized presenting a subject comprehensively and concretely in order to inform readers. Although the information writers needed came from personal experience, they were not tempted to write autobiography and they were not asked to narrate personally significant incidents. Although they wrote about favorite activities and classes, as in evaluation writing tasks, they were not encouraged to convince readers to accept the writer's judgment that the activities and classes were better than all others; instead, they were encouraged simply to describe the activities and classes.

In the April, 1988, assessment, report of information writing tasks also directed students to explain school learning to particular readers.

Achievement in Reporting of Information

Chart 7-1 summarizes the achievement of grade eight students in the writing of informative reports. Fifty-one percent of students (those scoring 6, 5, or 4) have learned that to inform a reader about a subject they must elaborate, exemplify, and describe, not just list main points or features. Because students were sharing information gained from personal experience about familiar subjects inviting endless elaboration, essays scored 4, although revealing some effort to elaborate, were surprisingly brief. Only 20 percent of students (those scoring 5 or 6) seem to move readily from general to specific—from main ideas to elaborations. To be informed, readers need examples and concrete details. Without them, attention wanders and no learning is possible. Strategies of elaboration—narrating activities, listing steps in a process, defining, giving examples, providing visual details, comparing or contrasting, and making analogies—are familiar to students as readers and can be readily added to their writing repertoires.

Sample Essays

Score Point 6: Exceptional Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 6
Feature (Elaboration): 6
Conventions: 6

4.1 percent of the students achieved this score.

Like all the other 6 essays in this report, this one could certainly be improved after discussion by a small group of students or a conference with the student's English teacher. For a time-limited, first-draft essay, however, it exemplifies exceptional achievement. The writer announces her topic early ("German . . . class"), provides context (language study at Egan Junior High School), and never loses focus. She frames the essay very successfully in paragraphs one and six by placing her German class in the larger school context.

The essay is authoritative and coherent and is masterfully organized. It moves from general information about topics of study and daily recurring activities to specific information about Thursday dialogues. The paragraph breaks are functional. Most important, the writer provides enough concrete information so that readers feel adequately informed about this particular German class. The fifth paragraph illustrates best this writer's achievement in elaborating one point in a satisfying way: informing readers (Canadian students) about Thursday dialogues, the writer details specific activities (dictation, translation, tapes, grading) and enumerates their frequency.

Although the opening and closing include brief statements of evaluation ("most interesting class" and "there isn't a better German class and teacher"), the writer does not argue for a judgment (as in evaluation). Instead, the writer reports on activities in one German class, detailing them fully enough for students elsewhere to know how students spend their time in this one class.

Not Titled

At our school, Egan Jr. High we can choose a language, Spanish, French, or German for one of

Chart 7-1
Achievement in Report of Information

Score Point	Percentage of California Grade 8 Students	Cumulative Percentage	Description of Achievement
6 Exceptional Achievement	4.1		The student presents substantial amounts of specific, concrete information which is focused and organized impressively; relies on a variety of strategies for presenting information; provides readers a context for the subject; concludes in a satisfying way; reveals enthusiasm for the subject and authority in writing about it.
5 Commendable Achievement	14.8	18.9	The student presents specific information although less than the writer of a 6, that is focused and well-organized; relies on a variety of strategies for presenting information; begins and ends effectively; reveals his or her enthusiasm and authority.
4 Adequate Achievement	32.3	51.2	The student presents specific information, as much as a 5, but usually more general than specific and not as well organized as a 5 or 6; usually begins effectively but may end clumsily; reveals interest in the subject but reflects less authority than the writer of a 5 or 6.
3 Some Evidence of Achievement	32.5	83.7	The student presents either limited information or adequate information poorly organized; usually relies more on general statements, opinion, or evaluation than on specific information.
2 Limited Evidence of Achievement	12.3	96.0	The student presents information that is brief and shakily organized, indicating that he or she has a very limited understanding of reporting information.
1 Minimal Evidence of Achievement	2.6	98.6	The student presents little information and that is badly organized or even incoherent. Although the essay is on topic, it reveals little evidence that the student understands how to report information.
No Response	0.2		
Off Topic	0.6		

our electives. Language is a full year course, and it is taught by Miss Prescott or Mrs. Ulchara. Miss Prescott teaches German and Spanish. German is one of my most interesting classes this year, and this is the class I chose to tell you about.

German is a 45 minute class, about not only their language, but the grammar and the culture of German, and other german speaking countries. We learn how to pronounce words and how to write correct sentences. Sometimes we learn extra information like the history of Berlin, or the customs of the German people. We learn about great people like Albert Einstein who was German, or the Austrian culture. I think the hardest part of German is the grammar. In this language verbs and nouns change with the word order, and how you pronounce words depend on if they are dative, accusative or nominative.

At the beginning of each class Miss Prescott assigns us a "warm up" to do. A large sheet of white paper with twelve words in English is put up in the front of the classroom. On a piece of scratch

paper the students must write the correct words in German. Miss Prescott calls on people to give the answers, three at a time. At this time we turn in our homework from the day before, and await the day's lesson.

What we do in class depends on the book we study out of. Our book is called German Today One. It consists of 23 chapters, each one containing a dialouge, a grammar section, a practice section containing about ten exercises, sometimes a "Kulterlesestuks" which is an essay on different parts of the German culture, and on last page of each chapter a list of vocabulary words.

Each Thursday we have a speaking grade and every Friday is a written test day. The speaking grades are the dialouges and "Kulterlesestuks form the chapter we work on. Sometimes Miss Prescott will use a sheet of 100 sentences in English for our speaking grade. What she does is dictate a sentence and we would have to translate that into German. She gives each person about four or five sentences. Based on how well you do, if you know the words, etc., she gives you your score between a 5 (F) and a 10 (A+). To study for the dialouges, Miss Prescott puts on a tape with two actual German people speaking the dialogue. Each day we listen twice to the tapes to understand how to correctly pronounce the words. Friday's written tests usually consist of vocabulary and grammar. We spend three weeks on each chapter, so the first week is just words, the second week, vocab. and some grammar and the last week is everything from that chapter.

German is open to any student wishing to take this course. Most 8th graders are in German II, because in 7th grade they took German I. German classes are small because not a lot of people are interested in this language. In a way this is a benefit because Miss Prescott can spend more time with one student. Our class has 28 people and we have been together for our second year, so we all have fun and enjoy the class.

German is a very interesting class because of all the variety our teacher, Miss Prescott puts into it. I am very glad I took it, and I am sure there isn't a better German class and teacher.

Score Point 5: Commendable Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 5
Feature (Elaboration): 4
Conventions: 4

14.8 percent of the students achieved this score.

Carefully but predictably organized, this authoritative essay announces and defines its topic straightforwardly. All of its "reasons" receive at least a few sentences of elaboration, but nearly all readers would welcome more information about what "kind of art" *tae kwon do* is and what is involved in practicing and mastering it. The writer underestimates readers' interests in concrete examples of one particular class at work or of typical activities during class meetings. The writer concludes too abruptly.

Not Titled

My hobbie is Taekwondo, so I guess that is what I like to do best. Taekwondo is a Korean martial arts form of Karate.

I like to practice Taekwondo for three main reasons. Fast of all it is very good excersice. Not only physically but also mentally. Physically it builds up muscle and keeps me fit. Mentally, Taekwondo has taught me to strive for what I want to achieve. Never quit and go for it all and keep a positive attitude.

My second reason is for the discipline. That may sound kind of crazy but I like discipline. All students higher rank than you or all of the instructors are to be called sir. You must bow to the Korean flag and bow to all blackbelts. We all respect each other. It may sound as if our Taekwondo school is a prison but its not. We have a lot of fun as we learn the art.

I called Taekwondo an art. That is my last reason for Taekwondo being what I like to do best. Any kind of art is nice to be able to do. Taekwondo is an art that takes many years to master it. I practice hard in Taekwondo and I feel I have accomplished a lot of skill and knolege. I get rewarded for my hard work with trophies from tournaments and certificates from tests.

By now you can probably tell why Taekwondo is the thing I like to do best.

Score Point 4: Adequate Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 4
Feature (Elaboration): 2
Conventions: 1

32.3 percent of the students achieved this score.

Written by a student still mastering English as a second language, this essay receives a low

conventions score. Although the writer struggles with conventions of grammar and idiom, he nevertheless understands how to think and write in a situation requiring informative discourse. From this essay Canadian students (the designated readers) who had no experience of wood-shop class would get some understanding of its activities, challenge, and appeal. The writer manages to convey his interest in the subject and his commitment to explaining it to readers. The only major rhetorical shortcoming is that the writer moves too quickly over many wood-shop class activities, elaborating on none of them. Like many adequate or limited essays in this assessment, this essay reveals a writer who could profit immediately from good instruction in strategies of elaborating and exemplifying. He is quite clearly capable of detailing the use of one machine or the steps in completing one project or presenting the class and teacher at work.

Not Titled

Wood-Shop is a class I really enjoy to take, because I learn how to carve, draft, and build things in which I get to take home and be proud of. To begin with, I learn how to carve by using my own two hands and gouge, by which I can cut, shape, indent, etc.. Creating my own ideas and then shaping and cutting them out on a piece of wood is realy exciting. Next, our assignments are fun and difficult too, because we have to think of something to make that includes drafting, such as; a plant holdr, or a book shelf. After thinking up something that we could use we then have to draft the figure just like arcatecs. Lastly, we learn how to use machines such as; a drill, ban-saw, sander, jig saw and others. After learning to use these machines, we apply them to our projects by cutting the wood, sanding it and drilling it together to form our projects. Everyday in Wood Shop is learned, exciting and fun, and because of those three basic traits of Wood-Shop that is why I realy enjoy it so much.

Score Point 3: Some Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 3
Feature (Elaboration): 1
Conventions: 3

32.5 percent of the students achieved this score.

Through tone and direct address, this writer seems continually aware of his reader. The beginning is appropriate, and the advice-giving conclusion is especially effective. For the most part, however, the writer deprives the reader of what he most needs, concrete information about the school. The writer mentions teams, events, and activities but fails to elaborate on any of them.

Not Titled

Dear Andrew,

I heard you were moving over here. I'm looking forward to see you again. So how is it going dude? I heard how hard it was transferring to the school you go to now. Well, I guess I'll help prepare you for this school since your biggest concern is changing schools.

One of the good things about our school is that we have a dance every month. We also have a bad football and basketball team. In P.E. we get to use good equipment. It's not the best but its good. Oh yeah, we also have a bunch of electives to choose from.

Now for the bad stuff. Yeah, I know you don't want to hear about them but you have to find out sooner or later. Well, here we go! First of all you can only wear shorts on Fridays unless its a special day. The food, the food isn't all that great. Well, that's about it.

If you're a new student, you should try to make a good impression on them the first couple of weeks. But don't over do it. Just don't act like youre superman you know. Don't even act like youre even just a bit conceited. Hope to see you soon dude.

Score Point 2: Limited Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 2
Feature (Elaboration): 2
Conventions: 3

12.3 percent of the students achieved this score.

This perfunctory essay reveals little commitment to its subject or interest in satisfying the reader. Its one redeeming feature is the small amount of elaboration for "entertainment": concerts, miniature golf, video games, water slides, dancing, and roller skating.

Not Titled

Dear Scott,

In your letter you asked me to tell you about my town or city. Well, if you want some entertaiment, you can go to a concert and see one of your favorite band members preform. Or you can go to Blackbeards and either play minature golf, video games and get wet on the water sides. They also have a place to dance, named the Light House And you can go to Fresno Roller Town, a place to skate.

As for jobs, you can have any job you want. You can study to be a teacher doctor, trucker, electrician, etc. It's your choice.

Score Point 1: Minimal Evidence of Achievement
Rhetorical Effectiveness: 1
Feature (Elaboration): 2
Conventions: 1

2.6 percent of the students achieved this score.

This barely readable essay (the handwritten version posed special problems) does express a glimmer of interest in its subject and even some confidence or authority in explaining how to get under way on a motorcycle. This information is not, however, what readers need to know to increase their understanding of owning and driving a motorcycle.

Not Titled

a mortorcycle is a two wheeled vyhical that goes when you move the exclator. There are all kinds of mortorcycles. you go buy gears usaly five gears one down and four up. when you get redy to go pull in the clutch and push down on the kick starter. after you have started push down on the gear changer. Then give it own gaes. then let clutch out slow.

Teachers' Comments on Achievement in Report of Information

California classroom teachers wrote comments like these after reading thousands of report of information essays during the summer of 1987:

Students need to organize information, include specific details, and give voice to their writing.

I'm going to continue working on detail but make sure that my students take longer to organize. Then I want them to stop when they have nothing more to say.

I will need to stress elaboration.

We need to put even stronger emphasis on elaboration of main points. Many students neglect to discuss a topic fully.

Intervention at critical points in the writing process may be the key to fostering better writing.

First, I am impressed with the number of students that are able to express their ideas in writing. I assumed that there would be more students who were unable to write at all. I am excited about the potential that is here and that can be developed once strong writing programs are in place.

We're making progress! It seemed that few students were unable to respond to the prompt. Many whose conventions scores were low displayed an ability to organize their thoughts on paper.

As I read, I learned a great deal about student writing—about what makes it strong. As a result, I believe I am better prepared to teach writing to my students. A big plus for me was meeting other teachers and sharing ideas and experiences.

I believe the scoring guide allows teachers to look at the substance of the paper—the quality of thought and content—thus allowing the students to write from their experiences—specifically and confidently.

Students need to learn to organize their thoughts going from general to specific ideas and at the same time give voice to their writing.

The terminology used on the scoring guide allows teachers to communicate about writing and discuss it professionally.

I was impressed with the quality of writing of many of the students. They had such diverse styles and unique ways of expressing themselves. With a little guidance, many of the weaker papers had the potential to be improved.

Chapter 8

Summary of Writing Achievement

This chapter summarizes the results of California's first statewide direct writing assessment for grade eight. The successful administration of this first writing assessment is a major accomplishment for California's teachers and students. The assessment was designed by a team of 20 outstanding classroom English teachers who have served as members of the CAP Writing Development Team. Each of 268,719 students wrote an essay in response to one of 15 prompts representing four types of writing. Nearly all students who took the test were able to comprehend the writing tasks and respond to the topic. At four regional scoring sites, all essays were scored in eight days by 290 teachers who considered the scoring sessions a valuable opportunity to learn more about the teaching of writing. (Their comments are contained in chapters 4 through 7.)

California's new writing assessment establishes high standards of academic achievement that reflect goals set out in the *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*[1], adopted by the California State Board of Education in 1986. To do well on the test, students must (1) think critically and write intelligently in a wide range of situations; (2) report information clearly; (3) present memories and observations vividly; (4) argue convincingly about ideas and problems; and (5) write effectively about literature, science, and history. (In 1988, writing tasks about literature, science, and history were included in the grade eight assessment.) Results from the first statewide grade eight writing assessment establish an achievement baseline from which improvements or declines in writing achievement can be monitored statewide in school districts and at each school site in the years ahead.

In 1987 grade eight students were assessed in four types of writing: autobiographical incident (narrating a personal experience); report of information (explaining personal knowledge about school, community, or hobbies); problem solution (arguing for a proposed solution to a school problem); and evaluation (justifying a judgment of a book, television program, or type of music).

In April, 1988, students also responded to prompts in firsthand biography (presenting a person they know well) and story (creating a fictional narrative). And in 1989, students will write essays on speculation about causes or effects (arguing for proposed causes or effects of phenomena or events) and observational writing (presenting remembered observations of people, places, and events). Together, these eight types of writing require wide-ranging thinking and writing strategies.

Major Findings

- Most students wrote adequate or marginally adequate essays (levels 3 and 4: 68 percent); a small percentage of students wrote impressively (levels 5 and 6: 13 percent); and a larger percentage of students wrote poorly (levels 1 and 2: 19 percent).

- Grade eight students seemed most competent at reporting information (52 percent scored 4 or higher); noticeably less competent at autobiography (46 percent scored 4 or higher); and markedly less skilled at the two kinds of persuasive writing in this assessment: arguing for solutions to solve problems (41 percent scored 4 or higher) and supporting their judgments (34 percent scored 4 or higher).

- Grade eight students have better control of conventions than of rhetorical strategies. For example, in writing evaluations, 34 percent scored 4 or higher for rhetorical effectiveness, and 58 percent scored 4 or higher for conventions. For every type of writing assessed, students scored higher in conventions than in the thinking and composing requirements (rhetorical effectiveness) for each type of writing.

- Essays were most coherent in autobiographical incident and more coherent in problem solution than in evaluation.

This chapter presents a summary of the results from the grade eight assessment for all scores and all types of writing, with interpretations and discussion provided by the members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee. It begins with a comparison of achievement in different types of writing (Chart 8-1), and continues with a comparison of achievement in feature scores (Chart 8-2) and a report of achievement in conventions for each type of writing (Chart 8-3). The information in Charts 8-1 through 8-3 is synthesized in Chart 8-4, which summarizes the weighted average of the percentages of all scores. These achievement levels are described and interpreted by the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee. The implications of the achievement levels are then discussed in the context of the probable writing and learning demands of high school. The information and discussion in this chapter is followed by Chapter 9, which presents the committee's recommendations drawn from the statewide results.

Comparisons of Achievement in Different Types of Writing

Do California's grade eight students write as well in one type of writing as in another? Chart 8-1, which brings together the results for achievement in rhetorical effectiveness (reflecting the thinking and composing performance for each type of writing) reported separately in chapters 3 through 6, indicates that students' achievement is better for some types of writing than for others.

Grade eight students seem most competent in reporting information, less competent in writing autobiographical incidents, and even less competent at arguing for solutions to solve problems and supporting their judgments in evaluations. Members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee expressed surprise that students can explain things better than they can write about remembered events, given the amount of personal writing assigned by junior high school English teachers. It appears that students are writing casually about personal experience as their writing reveals a lack of experience in writing reflective, shaped autobiography.

Students certainly appear to be struggling with the two forms of argument in this assessment, problem solution and evaluation. Fewer than 1 percent scored 6 and only 10 percent scored 5 in these important writing situations. Sixty to 65 percent of students scored no higher than 3. Problem solution requires students to describe a problem and argue convincingly for a solution. Students need to learn to anticipate their readers'

Chart 8-1

Percents of California Eighth Grade Students Achieving at Rhetorical Effectiveness Score Points in Four Types of Writing

	Score Point							
	Exceptional	Commendable	Adequate	Some Evidence of Achievement	Limited Evidence of Achievement	Minimal Evidence of Achievement	No Response	Off Topic
	6	5	4	3	2	1		
Autobiographical Incident	2.0	11.8	32.3	34.9	15.1	3.4		0.3
Evaluation	0.5	8.1	25.5	42.4	19.2	3.6	0.3	0.5
Problem Solution	0.7	9.3	29.6	39.9	16.7	3.2	0.2	0.5
Report of Information	4.1	14.8	32.3	32.5	12.3	2.6	0.2	0.6

objections and consider alternative solutions their readers may favor. Evaluation requires careful analysis of the subject being examined and confident use of evidence from it to support the writer's judgment.

Comparisons of Achievement in Feature Scores

The second score assigned to every student paper was a feature score. Feature scoring guides were designed to provide further information by addressing additional characteristics in the student writing, such as elaboration and coherence. Coherence was scored in autobiographical incident, problem solution, and evaluation; and elaboration was scored in report of information. In every case the feature scoring guides were tailored to the particular type of writing being assessed so that although coherence was assessed within three types of writing, the coherence scoring guides were designed to reflect the special characteristics of coherence in a given type of writing. Chart 8-2 presents the percentages of California grade eight students achieving six feature score points in the four types of writing.

This chart reveals that essays were most coherent in autobiographical incident and more coherent in problem solution than in evaluation, a result that parallels rhetorical effectiveness scores for these types of writing (see Chart 8-1). About the same percentage of these three types of essays was scored 4, 5, or 6 for rhetorical effectiveness as for coherence. By contrast, elaboration scores were lower than rhetorical effectiveness scores in report of information (39 percent versus 52 percent for score points 4 through 6 combined). It may have been easier for students to achieve coherence in autobiographical incident than in persuasive writing because of their greater familiarity with narrative rhetorical structures present in stories and novels than with the structures present in argument.

Chart 8-2

Percents of California Eighth Grade Students Achieving at Feature Score Points in Four Types of Writing

Feature	Score Point 6	5	4	3	2	1
Coherence (Autobiographical Incident)	2.7	12.2	30.7	34.0	16.1	3.8
Coherence (Evaluation)	1.6	7.4	23.3	40.1	22.7	4.3
Coherence (Problem Solution)	2.1	10.0	28.0	37.4	18.6	3.4
Elaboration (Report of Information)	3.4	9.8	26.1	43.9	14.5	1.5

Achievement in Conventions

Chart 8-3 reports the results of scoring essays for control of conventions.

Chart 8-3 indicates that California grade eight students have much better control of conventions (usage, spelling and punctuation) than of composing strategies. For example, in writing evaluations, 34 percent scored 4 or higher for rhetorical effectiveness and 58 percent scored 4 or higher for conventions. For every type of writing assessed,

Chart 8-3

Percents of California Eighth Grade Students Achieving at Conventions Score Points in Four Types of Writing

	Score Point 6	5	4	3	2	1	No Response	Off Topic
Conventions Autobiographical Incident	4.0	15.9	29.1	29.3	16.3	4.9	0.2	0.3
Conventions Evaluation	5.9	21.3	31.8	24.4	12.4	3.4	0.3	0.5
Conventions Problem Solution	3.9	15.6	28.1	31.4	17.0	3.4	0.2	0.5
Conventions Report of Information	6.5	20.3	32.5	27.8	10.1	1.9	0.2	0.6

students scored higher in conventions than in rhetorical effectiveness. Members of the committee were not displeased with the results for conventions, given that the papers reflected first-draft writing on a timed test.

Statewide Average Achievement Levels

Chart 8-4 reports statewide average scores, combining rhetorical effectiveness, feature, and conventions scores from all four types of writing. Within each type of writing, its three separate scorings were weighted as follows: rhetorical effectiveness (65 percent); feature score (25 percent); and conventions (15 percent). The third column in Chart 8-4, "General Performance Description," describes in a very general way what a hypothetical student can do at achievement levels 1 through 6.

Members of the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee observed from Chart 8-4 that most students write adequately or marginally adequate essays (levels 3 and 4: 68 percent). A small percentage of students write impressively (levels 5 and 6: 13 percent). More students (too many, in the opinion of the committee) write poorly (levels 1 and 2: 19 percent) than impressively.

Very few California grade eight students write well enough to meet the high standards of the state's new achievement test in writing—standards implied in California's 1986 *English–Language Arts Framework*[1]. Only 2 percent meet the highest standards, and no more than 13 percent perform beyond a level that can be considered acceptable or adequate. High-performing students who write at levels 5 or 6 probably fully understand typical school and realistic writing situations like those posed by this test: they can vividly retell personal experience, justify an evaluation, argue convincingly for the solution to a problem, or report information comprehensively and understandably. They control a wide range of thinking and writing strategies that enable them to achieve their purposes for particular readers. Their writing is developed, coherent, and nearly error-free. They know how to engage readers and hold their attention. They write with an authority and confidence that inspires readers' trust. (Examples of essays representing all of Chart 8-4's average achievement levels can be found in Chapters 4-7.)

Students who write at achievement level 4 know how to respond to a wide range of writing situations. They write coherently and with few errors and seem aware of their readers. They do not, however, develop scenes, points, or arguments as fully as writers at achievement levels 5 and 6. Their writing often lacks controlling focus and the kind of commitment, energy, or liveliness that writing teachers call "voice." Still, given the high standards of this writing assessment, level 4 represents solid writing achievement. Students who can step up to this plateau are ready for the refinements that can lead them still higher. Forty-three percent of California's eighth graders achieve at least level 4.

At achievement level 3, students are poised for substantial writing development. They recognize and respond appropriately to the four writing situations in the 1987 test, but their writing reveals a limited range of thinking-in-writing strategies. They are unlikely, for example, to include specific evidence from a novel or movie to support an evaluation of it or to anticipate readers' objections to a proposed solution to a problem or to vivify a remembered scene with concrete visual details. Although their essays are readable, level 3 writers cannot consistently maintain coherence and they make frequent errors. Because students writing at this level can readily improve their writing, teachers working with them can observe noticeable improvement. Fully 80 percent of California's eighth graders already achieve at least at level 3.

Students writing at level 2 (16 percent) and at level 1 (3 percent) cannot write very much (nearly always less than a page in 45 minutes of writing time). They cannot maintain coherence, and they make many errors. They recognize the writing situation and can produce a few sentences on topic, but they have few if any thinking/writing strategies for developing their ideas. The Writing Assessment Advisory Committee agreed that many students who do not write well are those who are tracked into skill-and-drill curricula in which bland dittos and worksheets substitute for effective writing instruction.

Context for the Achievement Results in Chart 8-4

The CAP writing assessment is a full-range achievement test that challenges the very best writers while at the same time realistically evaluating the writing of all of those tested. The results

Chart 8-4
Statewide Average Achievement*

Score Point	Percentage of California Grade 8 Students**	Cumulative Percentage	General Performance Description
6 Exceptional Achievement	2.0	2	The student produces purposeful, focused writing that reflects exceptional insight into the writing situation; reveals commitment to the subject, confidence in presenting it, and careful consideration of readers' knowledge and values; shows versatile use of writing strategies appropriate to his or her purpose; engages readers from the beginning and closes in a satisfying way; maintains coherence throughout; elaborates main points or important scenes and people specifically and completely, and commits few if any sentence-level errors.
5 Commendable Achievement	12	14	The student produces purposeful, focused writing that reflects full understanding of the writing situation; reveals interest in the subject, confidence in presenting it, and awareness of readers; uses writing strategies well chosen for his or her purpose; maintains coherence and develops main points; and commits few sentence-level errors.
4 Adequate Achievement	29	43	The student produces writing that reflects good understanding of the writing situation; indicates that he or she is aware of readers and controls relevant writing strategies for satisfying readers' expectations; maintains coherence; develops some ideas or points moderately well; and commits occasional sentence-level errors.
3 Some Evidence of Achievement	36	79	The student produces writing that reflects understanding of the writing situation, but shows that the writer controls only a narrow range of writing strategies; reveals little awareness of readers and limited development of ideas (though usually more than a page in length); reveals occasional lapses in coherence; and commits noticeable sentence-level errors, though the essay is still easily readable.
2 Limited Evidence of Achievement	16	95	The student produces writing that is on topic but reflects little understanding of the possibilities for presenting a subject to readers; shows restricted development of ideas (rarely more than a page in length); reveals occasional lapses in coherence; and commits frequent sentence-level errors that sometimes slow or stop the reader.
1 Minimal Evidence of Achievement	3	98	The student produces a few sentences (rarely more than a page) on topic; sometimes shows fragmentary or incoherent listing of loosely related sentences; and may commit errors in every sentence.

*Weighted Average Percentage of Three Scores in Four Types of Writing
**This column does not total to 100% because of off-topic, no response, and rounding.

provide information about how well teachers in California junior high schools and middle schools enable students to realize their intellectual potential and prepare them for continued achievement in high school. It also provides a direct performance assessment of the goals of California's *English-Language Arts Framework*[1], which are to prepare all students to:

- Function as informed and effective citizens in our democratic society.
- Function effectively in the world of work.
- Realize personal fulfillment.

Two recent developments must bear on interpretation of the statewide average achievement levels in Chart 8-4. One development is curricular, and the other comes from new theory and research on the role of writing in learning and intellectual development. The continuing curriculum reform movement in California's schools sets higher standards of achievement for all students. It is commonly agreed that the reform efforts cannot come to fruition unless achievement in reading, writing, listening, speaking—the essential literacy activities—can be enhanced for all students. Reflecting current views of language, learning, and literacy, new publications from the California State Department of Education detail the curricular and instructional requirements for fuller achievement in reading and writing for all California students (English–*Language Arts Framework, K-12*[1]; *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, K-8*[2]; *Handbook for Planning an Effective Literature Program, K-12*[3]; *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program, K-12*[4]; *Recommended Reading in Literature, K-8*[5]; and *Model Curriculum Standards, 9-12*[6]). Together, these publications present a vision of lively, challenging, and effective English–language arts programs. By emphasizing comprehensive writing programs and close reading of valued works of literature, the new programs set higher expectations for all students, expectations with widespread support from parents and from teachers. The CAP writing assessment surveys how well schools and students are meeting the higher expectations.

Strengthened middle school and junior high school English–language arts programs will make new demands of students, as will the high school English programs toward which students are headed. In California's high schools, where there is a new emphasis on higher-order thinking strategies, students will be writing more and longer pieces on all subjects. The *Framework* notes that "the relationship between writing and human thought, basic to all disciplines, becomes the province of all teachers, who become helpers in the teaching of writing across the disciplines." To meet the writing demands of high school, junior high school and middle school students will need to be able to write well in a wide range of situations, many of which arise from new learning and from assigned reading. Continuing growth in cultural literacy during the high school years requires critical thinking and writing, particularly in response to the ideas and values encountered in literature-centered English classes.

The increased thinking and writing demands of high school will be brought into even better focus as new science and history–social science curriculum frameworks developed by the Department of Education begin to influence school programs. The new grade twelve CAP writing assessment will also contribute to higher standards and to higher expectations of all students. Designed much like the grade eight test, the new grade twelve test will assess a wider range of argumentative writing requiring interpretation, judgment, speculation, careful use of evidence, and sensitivity to readers' knowledge and attitudes. Students will be asked to write about their learning in science and history–social science as well as about works of literature read in their English classes.

The high school cross-curricular writing requirements discussed previously might seem exaggerated if it were still possible to consider writing merely a way of reporting what one has learned rather than a way to learn and a significant contributor to personal and intellectual development. New views of language and of written language in particular give writing a central, essential role in learning, not a peripheral role. In a recent book (*Written Language and Psychological Development*, Ablex, 1986), Leonard Scinto concludes that "later phases of psychological development and, in particular, higher mental functions" can best be understood by considering the special contributions made by written lan-

guage. Agreeing and reflecting on their studies of writing in schools, Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee *(How Writing Shapes Thinking*[7]) point out that writing is "a major vehicle for conceptual learning in all the academic disciplines." They conclude that "written language does indeed make a contribution to content learning, and it can support the more complex kind of reasoning that is increasingly necessary for successful performance in our complex technological and information-based culture."

Although grade eight students are a few years away from parenthood, voting, citizenship, career, or college, it is possible to conjecture about how well their current level of writing achievement prepares them for these inevitable roles. It would be a grave mistake to underestimate the importance of writing to all these roles. Even more than in high school, students in college are known to their instructors largely through their writing. To succeed in college, students must know how to use writing for learning and be able to write confidently in various academic writing situations. Their writing achievement will determine to a large extent whether they remain in college. It may even influence their decision to apply for admission to college. More than ever before, careers depend on information management. Only students who write adequately or better have access to the full range of career choices and to requisite advanced training. Writing contributes to active, responsible citizenship. Students who cannot write adequately may be unable to ensure their rights and privileges, participate fully in community organizations or in action groups, adopt leadership roles, and influence the thinking of others.

Implications of Achievement Levels in Chart 8-4

The achievement levels in Chart 8-4 contain implications regarding the degree to which California's eighth graders are prepared to take advantage of the reading, thinking, and writing opportunities in more challenging high school programs as well as the degree to which students are capable of using writing for purposes of citizenship. A review of the results summarized in Chart 8-4 and the essays scored at levels 5 and 6 in chapters 4 through 7 reveal that there is little reason to worry about the ability of these students to benefit from a stimulating high school program—judging from one sample of their writing performance alone. Students writing at levels 5 and 6 who can produce purposeful, focused writing that reflects insight, elaborates main points or important scenes and people specifically and completely, shows versatile use of writing strategies well chosen for the writer's purpose, and commits few errors in mechanics and spelling are achieving at a level that ensures the fullest possible contribution of writing to learning and to personal and intellectual growth. Such students have demonstrated that they can write with an authority and confidence that inspires readers' trust, an ability which is likely to help them ensure their rights and privileges, participate fully in community and school organizations and action groups, and influence the thinking of others.

Level 4 represents solid writing achievement. At this level the writing develops some ideas or points moderately well, indicates that the writer is aware of readers and controls relevant writing strategies for satisfying readers' expectations, maintains coherence and commits occasional sentence-level errors. Students who have reached this level are poised and ready to benefit from instruction that will lead them still higher. Their level of writing proficiency promises to contribute to personal and intellectual growth through writing and promises to meet most of the writing demands of high school. These students, like those achieving at levels 5 and 6, have demonstrated that they can use written language at a level likely to help them ensure their rights and privileges, participate fully in community and school organizations and action groups, and influence the thinking of others—though perhaps not yet so fluently and engagingly as those achieving at levels 5 and 6.

The greatest percentage of grade eight students (37.4 percent) attained level 3 in writing ability. At that level, student writing is easily readable and usually more than a page in length but reveals little awareness of readers and achieves limited development of ideas. The papers show that their authors control only a narrow range of writing strategies, reveal occasional lapses in coherence, and commit noticeable sentence-level errors. Although this level of writing achievement still enables participation in learning and contributes to personal and intellectual growth, success with the writing demands of high school is likely to be limited

unless substantial development in writing ability occurs.

At levels 2 and 1, students produce writing that is on topic but shows restricted fluency and development of ideas and reveals lapses in coherence and frequent sentence-level errors which sometimes slow or stop the reader. These levels of writing achievement are likely to limit and in some cases severely restrict participation in learning through writing. Success with the writing demands of high school is likely to be frustrated and endangered.

References

1. *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
2. *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
3. *Handbook for Planning an Effective Literature Program: Kindergarten Through Grade 12*, Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
4. *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
5. *Recommended Reading in Literature: Kindergarten Through Grade 8*. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
6. *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve*. Sacramento, Calif.: California State Department of Education, 1985.
7. Judith A. Langer and Arthur N. Applebee. *How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1987.

Chapter 9

Summary of Recommendations

From California's first statewide direct writing assessment come varied findings. Chapters 4 through 7 present these findings for each of the four types of writing assessed, and Chapter 8 summarizes the results for all scores and all types of writing, notes inferences to be made from them, and conjectures about possible interpretations. With these findings and interpretations as the context, members of the Writing Development Team produced recommendations for classroom teachers, school district and school-site curriculum leaders, parents, and teacher educators so that all of these groups might contribute to improved writing achievement in California as higher standards of literacy are put into place.

Recommendations for Teachers

1. **Teachers should offer junior high school and elementary school students more direct instruction in the special writing and thinking strategies required for different types of writing.** Teachers should expect of each student the highest possible writing achievement in several kinds of writing, not mere competency in one or two. Teachers will need to assign sustained (multiparagraph) writing frequently and help students revise to strengthen rhetorical effectiveness. By helping students analyze their own writing along with published writing, teachers enable students to gain confidence with the special writing strategies of many types of writing.

2. Because writing development depends in part on reading development, teachers should ensure that all students read widely, analyze some works in depth, speculate about characters' motivations, reflect on human values, and debate social issues. **Students should also have an opportunity to read and analyze the same type of reading they are writing. For example, they should read and discuss published autobiography as they write autobiographical incidents and firsthand biographies, short stories as they write stories,**

articles speculating about the causes of events or phenomena as they write essays speculating about causes, and so on. The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] includes suggested readings appropriate to the types of writing CAP assesses.

3. **Teachers should extend the intensive and sustained literacy program described in the first two recommendations to all students—disadvantaged students as well as advantaged students, students whose primary language is other than English as well as fluent speakers of English, and low achievers as well as high achievers. Some students are denied opportunities for such enriched programs as a result of inappropriately low teacher expectations. Special efforts must be made to ensure equally challenging classrooms for all.** "Limited-English Proficient" students should have opportunities to build on their abilities to think about a topic by beginning with informal writing and proceeding through the writing process to produce fully realized essays. All students should have practice telling and writing about their experience as it supports their emerging values and opinions.

4. **Teachers should provide more careful instruction in types of persuasive writing, such as those assessed by CAP, for students in middle school.** In keeping with Recommendation 2 teachers should present samples of persuasive writing as literature in junior high and middle schools to provide students with exemplary models to help them write their own arguments. (See *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] for suggested readings for evaluation, problem solution and speculation about causes and effects.)

5. **Teachers should discuss with each student the specific strategies of autobiographical incident (using dialogue; providing visual details of scenes; and showing characters moving, talking, gesturing) to help them lift their writing above the level of rambling or brief generalization.** This emphasis should be reinforced by the careful reading of published autobiography and the use of exemplary models of student-produced autobiographical writing such as those included in the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3].

6. **Teachers should help students use the stages of the writing process, with special attention being given to specific composing strategies for different kinds of writing so that students will learn to revise their writing with the help of appropriate criteria.** The best classroom writing assignments require a rich, sustained composing process for completion: discussion, prewriting, or research; drafting; teacher conference and guided peer response; revision; appreciative peer readarounds; student self evaluation of learning during the composing process; and display or publication. (See the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program*[4], for a more complete description of the stages of the writing process.)

7. **Teachers should keep in mind other types of writing not assessed by CAP as important and worthwhile types that should not be dropped simply because they are not tested.** There are types of writing (such as poetry and song lyrics) that are desirable in a well-rounded English–language arts program but not appropriate for large-scale assessment.

Recommendations for School District and School-Site Administrators

1. **School-site administrators should ensure that CAP writing assessment materials are available to all English–language arts teachers.** These materials include *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement: Grade 8*[5] (1987), along with scoring guides and sample essays (mailed to all junior high and middle schools in November, 1987); and the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] (mailed to all California school districts with an eighth grade in November, 1986). (For further information regarding these

documents, contact the CAP office at 916-322-2200.)

2. **School-site administrators should bring all teachers together to discuss the possibilities for sustained writing in all classes at all levels.** Beginning in 1988, CAP grade eight test prompts will direct some students to write about their learning in history and science as well as their reading of literature. A middle school with grades six through eight might want to divide up for special emphasis by grade levels the eight types of writing to be assessed by 1989, ensuring, however, that each type is returned to at least once each year. Such a plan, combining writing with core and recreational reading requirements, would provide the systematic, articulated English–language arts curriculum called for in California's *English–Language Arts Framework*[1]. (See Section IV, "Management Guidelines," in the *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3].)

3. The best staff development model for English–language arts provides for a series of workshops over a substantial period of time. If students are to meet the high literacy standards set by the CAP writing assessment, junior high school teachers need a deep understanding of the writing and thinking demands of a wide range of types of writing. Such understanding requires time to read, write, and discuss. One-time staff-development presentations offering only further gimmicks will not deepen teachers' understanding of discourse or increase their students' achievement. **Administrators should make a special effort to help teachers schedule in-service training workshops extending over several sessions and led by qualified teacher-consultants.**

4. Because good writing instruction requires an amount of tutorial or conference time, teachers must be able to talk to students about their writing in progress, not just mark and grade finished essays. **For this basic requirement for good writing to be met, class size must be reduced for all English–language arts teachers in California schools.**

5. Many publishers and private consultants are already offering materials and workshops and promising to improve students' scores on the CAP writing assessment. Schools and school districts should evaluate these offerings carefully. Schools should especially consider whether published materials offer anything not already available in the teacher-developed, classroom-tested *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3]. Consultants promising formulas, easy solutions, or quick results will have little to offer teachers who want to teach seriously the types of writing CAP assesses and to prepare their students for adequate to high achievement in these types. Consultants who are unable or unwilling to concern themselves with the specific rhetorical requirements of the types of writing CAP assesses will be able to add very little to what teachers already know. **If writing instruction is to move to a new level of effectiveness—to become an even higher priority within the context of a balanced literature-based English–language arts curriculum—then only the best-qualified consultants will be able to contribute materials and workshops.** Members of CAP's Writing Development Team are qualified to advise other teachers, along with California Writing Project and California Literature Project Fellows who have been specially trained to present CAP materials.

6. The CAP writing assessment should not supplant individual student writing assessment at the school site. **Schools need to develop their own assessment programs, such as portfolio assessment or schoolwide assessment of writing samples.** The CAP writing assessment provides teachers with useful strategies and techniques for their own assessments. For example, the types of writing assessed in grade eight suggest a wide range of writings that might be included (or even required) in a portfolio, and criteria

outlined in the scoring guides could assist in evaluating a student's best work in a portfolio. Additional types of writing, such as poetry, song lyrics and dialogue, might also be included. Writing portfolios can follow students from year to year and provide repeated occasions for students' assessments of their writing development and for parent conferences.

Recommendations for Parents

1. **Parents should encourage good teaching of writing by inquiring specifically about the amount and variety of sustained (multiparagraph) writing their children are being assigned in every class.** They can ask how much of the writing will be revised for both rhetorical effectiveness and conventions. Parents can show their appreciation to teachers who make engaging assignments and encourage children's writing development.

2. **Parents should show their children that they are especially interested in all the writing they complete at school.** Children can read their writing aloud and display it on the refrigerator door, and they can talk about what they like best about a piece of writing. Parents should respond first of all to the ideas and insights in the writing. They should look for something to praise and need not correct errors unless asked by the children. To persist with the challenging work of learning to write, young writers need their writing to be taken seriously and to be praised and encouraged, especially by parents and siblings.

3. **Parents can ask their children to write.** Several writing situations are suggested by classroom teacher Mary Adamczyk (in the *New York Times*, January 3, 1988). Students may be encouraged to:

    - Compose invitations to a dinner, party, or picnic.
    - Compose stories for a sibling.
    - List things needed for an overnight stay.
    - Plead a case for an additional privilege—anything from a later bedtime to a driver's license.
    - Make a deal ("If you let me . . ., then I'll . . . .") Considering faulty memories, this is a particularly good time to get it in writing.
    - Justify an allowance increase with an expense account and budget, perhaps including a savings plan.
    - Rationalize a special purchase (for example, a hamster or a computer video game).
    - Negotiate wages for extra chores by submitting a written bid describing the work to be done, benefits, wages, guarantees, and deadlines.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

1. **College and university English departments should offer English teachers in training a balanced program in literature, language study, and writing.** Teachers need writing workshops as well as literature courses. They must be knowledgeable about the full range of written discourse. Better, they should be confident writers across the full range of written discourse.

2. **English methods courses should introduce students to the new *English–Language Arts Framework*[1] as well as to CAP writing assessment materials.** The *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8*[3] and *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 12*[4] can contribute substantially to students' education in contemporary discourse. Model student essays, scoring guides, writing assignments, classroom activities, and recommended readings provide rich material for discussion and lesson planning.

References

1. *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
2. *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.
3. *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 8.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
4. *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1986.
5. *A Report to Teachers on Writing Achievement: Grade 8.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987
6. *Writing Assessment Handbook: Grade 12.* Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1987.

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